

**Noise Control
— and You**

But laws aren't enough to solve the noise problem. You might think the problem is too big to tackle individually, but since we all contribute to the noise problem, we can all be part of the solution. Some solutions may be difficult, others quite simple; but few will work if we don't get involved.

How do we start? We need to become aware of where the noise comes from and what harm it does. We need to make our local government officials aware that we are upset about noise. We should push for enforcement of noise laws already on the books and, if needed, offer our support for new ones.

In our own neighborhoods, we can make a difference. Discuss the problem with your neighbors and friends. Make it a community goal to reduce noise in your area. Investigate the possibility of rerouting trucks away from residential neighborhoods. Give serious consideration to asking that proposed highways be relocated so they skirt residential areas instead of going through them. Residents of several cities have achieved positive results in reducing noise this way.

- In Baltimore, neighborhood residents were successful in getting large trucks off the narrowest side streets;
- In Seattle and other cities, programs have been adopted to prevent unnecessary use of sirens by ambulances and other public vehicles;
- The Bedford-Stuyvesant Community Development Corporation in New York and the Chicago Housing Authority sponsor voluntary gardening programs. In Brooklyn, the program has been expanded to tree and shrubbery planting to create open green space in areas where abandoned buildings have been torn down.

In California, another simple and inexpensive sound-reducing technique was demonstrated at the Oakland airport, when the airport authority simply rerouted its noisiest aircraft from the north runway to its south runway so that the most trouble some aircraft would take off over the San Francisco Bay rather than over a residential neighborhood. As simple as that solution sounds, the airport managers had not even considered that change in the past, simply because they had been told that they did not have the authority to do anything about noise.

Noise in the central city can be controlled and reduced. Other cities and neighborhoods are doing something about it and you can too. The city may never be as quiet as the countryside, but we can do a lot toward making it a healthier, more pleasant place to live.

This is one in a series of EPA booklets on public constituencies and the environment.

EPA is charged by Congress to protect the Nation's land, air and water systems. Under a mandate of national environmental laws focused on air and water quality, solid waste management and the control of toxic substances, pesticides, noise and radiation, the Agency strives to formulate and implement actions which lead to a compatible balance between human activities and the ability of natural systems to support and nurture life.

If you have suggestions, questions, or requests for further information, they may be directed to your nearest EPA Regional public information office.

EPA Region 1 • JFK Federal Bldg. • Boston MA 02203 • Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont • 617-223-7210

EPA Region 2 • 26 Federal Plaza • New York NY 10007 • New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands • 212-264-2525

EPA Region 3 • 6th and Walnut Streets • Philadelphia PA 19106 • Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, District of Columbia • 215-597-9014

EPA Region 4 • 345 Courtland Street NE • Atlanta GA 30308 • Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky • 404-881-4727

EPA Region 5 • 230 S. Dearborn • Chicago IL 60604 • Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota • 312-353-2000

EPA Region 6 • 1201 Elm Street • Dallas TX 75270 • Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico • 214-767-2600

EPA Region 7 • 1736 324 East 11th Street • Kansas City MO 64100 • Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska • 816-274-5493

EPA Region 8 • 1660 Lincoln Street • Denver CO 80203 • Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota • 303-837-3695

EPA Region 9 • 215 Fremont Street • San Francisco CA 94106 • Arizona, California, Nevada, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Trust Territories of the Pacific • 415-556-2320

EPA Region 10 • 1200 Sixth Avenue • Seattle WA 98101 • Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington • 206-442-1220

United States
Environmental Protection
Agency
Washington DC 20460
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300

Postage and
Fees Paid
Environmental
Protection
Agency
EPA 335



**EPA Noise —
It Hurts!**

A-96-01
II-A-844



The central city. A place where many people live, but also a place many others only pass through on their way to and from work. Commuters come and go in cars, trains, buses, and on motorcycles. The sounds of their passing — roaring engines, screeching tires, blaring horns, and the rumble of steel wheels — echo off the closely-packed buildings.

These sounds mingle with those of the working world — trucks, elevated trains, construction equipment, industrial machines, factories, and the banging of trash cans. Ambulances, fire and police sirens add to the din. Loud music blares from stores, bars, taverns, and discos, often late into the night.

The problem is worsened by the lack of landscape in the central city neighborhood. There are few sound-muffling trees and shrubs, and even fewer expanses of greenery, only concrete buildings and asphalt streets.

The result of all this? NOISE!

Noise is a fact of life in the central city. Unhealthy, irritating, and constant noise degrades the quality of life for people living in the city's core. Unlike suburbanites who come into town to work and then leave at day's end for the quiet of their neighborhoods, the residents of the central city are surrounded by noise day and night. For them, it is an especially difficult problem.

But it doesn't have to be that way — with some common sense, and a community effort, noise problems can be controlled.

Noise Effects

We tend to think of noise as the price we must pay for living in the modern world. Though we seem to adjust to noise by ignoring it, this is not the case. The ear never closes, and the body responds to noise in our sleep. Day or night, anytime noise irritates or annoys us, we should consider it a warning that other things are happening to us, some of which may be harmful to our health.

The most obvious effect of noise is hearing loss. Hearing loss due to noise is usually gradual. It happens little by little, and slowly reduces the ability of people to communicate with each other. Unfortunately, by the time the damage has occurred, it is too late to recover what has been lost. There is no cure. Hearing aids can not restore noise-damaged hearing, although they can be of limited help to some people.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that hearing loss is caused only by industrial noise. Noise loud enough to cause hearing loss is almost everywhere in the city. When people have to raise their voices to be heard, the background noise may be injurious.

In Chicago, the Jackson Park "El", operated around the clock, passes within feet of some apartment buildings, generating noise the equivalent of one person shouting in another's ear.

Noise also leads to stress, and city residents suffer from it as much or more than anyone else. Sudden losses of temper, sleeplessness, irritability, depression, aggressive and hostile behavior are common, but sometimes unidentified, symptoms of noise-induced stress.

Noise particularly affects children growing up in the central city because it reduces their ability to learn. Their concentration is easily interrupted by noise, and during the early school years, a child's capacity to read and pronounce words may be seriously impaired by continuous exposure to noise. Sadly, children have few chances of escaping noise in urban neighborhoods — whether at home, play, or school.

Old and young alike react to noise. Blood pressure rises, heart rate and breathing speed up, muscles tense, hormones are released into the blood-stream. These changes occur to persons both awake and sleeping, and noise does not have to be loud to set them off.

Hearing loss, learning problems, stress, body changes, all are problems arising from noise.

Noise Control

Most noise problems can be solved. Many State and local governments already have noise ordinances and "public nuisance" laws. But usually these ordinances aren't enforced. Either the wording of the laws is too vague or local officials don't think it's that important.

Since 1972, when the first national noise control law was passed, the Federal government has been involved

in noise control. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for setting noise limits for trains, trucks, machinery and many other sources of loud, harmful noise. EPA will soon be requiring noise labels on consumer products that will enable you to compare the loudness of appliances before you buy them. The Agency also provides assistance to State and local governments in setting up noise control programs — an area that will now receive a greater emphasis.

On November 8th, 1978, the President signed the Quiet Communities Act of 1978. This law directs EPA to greatly increase the assistance it provides to State and localities in developing and carrying out their own noise control programs based on local needs.

The Agency will be expanding the help it now gives to communities under the ECHO (Each Community Helps Others) and Quiet Communities Programs. Under ECHO, communities that already have established noise abatement programs help others in setting up programs. Under the Quiet Communities Program EPA helps a community develop a comprehensive, effective noise abatement program tailored to local needs. All segments of the communities are involved: local officials, business groups, civic groups and individual citizens.

Although EPA is not directly responsible for controlling aircraft noise, the Agency does recommend aircraft noise regulations to the Federal Aviation Administration.

