



COMMUNITY NOISE ANNOYANCE

The Issue

There is concern about excessive community noise because people can find it highly annoying. Over a period of time, such high annoyance can affect one's quality of life.

Background

As communities become more crowded, environmental noise levels increase. Health Canada commissioned two recent cross-country telephone surveys to find out how annoyed people were by different types of community noise. Randomly selected Canadians, who were at least 15 years old, answered the survey questions. Eight percent indicated that they were highly annoyed by noise outside their homes. Two main types of noise were clearly identified as being highly annoying:

- Road traffic noise
- Noises from other people and animals outside or in another dwelling

Other reports indicate that the following noise sources may also make Canadians highly annoyed:

- Aircraft and trains
- Construction equipment
- Power landscaping equipment

Scientists measure the levels of different sounds with a unit called the A-weighted decibel (dBA). The A-weighting reflects how people respond to sound. In a typical community, noise starts to make people highly annoyed when the sound

level outside their home is around 55dBA. In comparison, the sound level on the shoulder of a major highway is between 80 and 90dBA.

Health Risks of Community Noise

The most common effect of community noise is annoyance, which is considered an adverse health effect by the World Health Organization. But noise may also affect your ability to have an ordinary conversation, enjoy some leisurely activities, get a good night's sleep, or do work that needs thought and concentration.

Minimizing Your Risk

Everyone has a responsibility to minimize noise in the community. Most municipalities have noise by-laws. Check with your municipality to find out what might apply in your neighborhood.

- Check your own noise sources. Your TV, radio or stereo could be a source of annoyance for your neighbor if you have to shout to be understood above your usual volume setting.
- Mowing your lawn when most people are normally trying to sleep could be a source of annoyance for your neighbor.
- When noise interferes with sleep, wearing ear plugs can help reduce noise levels, provided they do not cause discomfort.



Government of Canada's Role

Health Canada conducts research to assess the potential health risks of community noise. This research is used to assess the need for regulations under the Radiation Emitting Devices Act for noisy outdoor machinery and equipment. It is also used to help advise Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Municipal authorities on community noise. As well, the research is used to inform the public and, where needed, recommend protective measures.

Under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, Health Canada provides advice to other Federal departments, public review panels and mediators on the potential health impacts of noise from a number of different projects. These have included expansions of airport runways, highways and railways as well as the building of wind turbines. To help with this work, the Department is developing Health Canada's Noise Impact Assessment Guidance for Environmental Assessments. In addition, Health Canada contributes to the development of U.S., Canadian and international standards on the description, measurement and assessment of environmental noise.

Need More Info?

For more information on noise issues, please go to:

Aircraft noise
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/environ/noise-bruit_e.html

Hearing Loss and Leisure noise
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/environ/leisure-loisirs_e.html

D.S. Michaud et al. (2005) Noise Annoyance in Canada. Noise & Health at:
www.ingentaconnect.com/search?title=Noise+annoyance+in+Canada&database=1

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety noise fact sheet at:
www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/phys_agents/noise_basic.html

The World Health Organization, Occupational and Community Noise fact sheet at:
www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs258/en/

If you are noticing problems with your hearing please contact your family doctor or audiologist.

For more information on audiologists go to the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists at:
www.caslpa.ca/

For information on preventing noise induced hearing loss go to the Wise Ears Web site at:
www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/wise/index.asp

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the It's Your Health Web site at:
www.healthcanada.ca/iyh
You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709
or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*