How Afghanistan Was Lost to the Russians

By SEN. AND MRS. DANIEL PATRICK MONTANARO
Urban noise is driving many citizens batty, but a few towns find ways to crack down

Bloomington’s noise program is typical of the most effective. Noise cops patrol the city’s streets in a squad car equipped with sophisticated decibel-detection equipment, looking for cars, trucks and motorcycles that are excessively noisy. Motorists not only face an automatic fine, they also have their vehicles impounded for 14 days and then prove their worth to a court of review. Any who are found to have exceeded the legal decibel levels will be penalized.

In addition, Bloomington’s street department has begun a program of resurfacing residential streets with quieter paving materials, and the city has employed developers to build earth mounds known as “berms” to shield residents from noisy streets.

Lon Loken reports that the program has gathered wide support. “People call me up and say, ‘Please take my street.’”

If you get caught in other cities, says Bloomington Councilman Tom Spies, “you might get off with just paying a small fine instead of spending $100 for a new muffler system.” But in Bloomington, “we’ve got to stop that system—or else.”

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'...the city even fights loud parties in apartments...'

SHH!

Bloomington, a suburb of the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, passed its noise ordinance in 1973 and 1974 in response to citizen complaints and census data, both of which showed noise to be a growing community concern. The ordinances incorporated features of a variety of state and municipal noise control proposals, plus some unique twists. The program went through with little opposition and has been tested since so far as the point that this city of 76,000 has one employee plus a temporary employee working full-time on noise in summer, when problems peak.

Bloomington's police fill one slot in the noise program on a rotating basis. "At first, a lot of the guys were skeptical about the program," says Bloomington noise cop Dan Latiure. "But now even the old-timers who weren't all that interested in the program are out there, writing the tags."

Bloomington's noise cops have even received an ancient ally in their fight against noise—the horse. The city has horseback patrol in the parks and around the edges, where cars don't produce motor noise of their own. The city also fights loud parties in apartments by holding every guest, not just the host, legally responsible.

Bloomington also requires its inns to maintain a noise level below 60 decibels at night. The city has a noise ordinance that requires sound levels from commercial and industrial areas to meet a sound level standard of 60 decibels at night.

How Other Citians Can Get Help

Communities looking to start their own noise programs can get some help from the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA, through its regional offices, will provide interested towns with experts, equipment loans, and, in some cases, a small start-up grant. The EPA has also started a program that enables communities to increase noise control workers from established programs, thereby gaining the benefits of a national program.

In spite of all these programs, municipal noise control workers continue to be rare birds. In fact, Jesse D. Johnson, assistant director of NACO's (National Association of County Officials) noise control program, says that there are only 30 to 35 municipal noise control programs in the country with full-time employees.

Even though a few cities have made progress, the truth is that for most of the country, noise remains a disease with many cures but few doctors.