

Noise Pollution—What's That?

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National Urban League

Noise Pollution—What's That?



Noise is one of the most serious and also one of the most ignored of all the problems that confront people who live in the cities. The fact that you can't see, taste or smell it may help explain why it has not received as much attention as other types of pollution, such as air pollution or

water pollution. But make no mistake, city dwellers are faced every day with physically and mentally harmful levels of noise.

For that reason, the National Urban League, which has always been committed to improving the quality of city life, has prepared this pamphlet. The questions and answers that follow have been devised to give you the facts about urban noise and to describe the steps that you can take to protect your family, your community and yourself.

Q. Noise is so much a part of life in the city, why the big fuss about it now?

A. Sure, noise is taken pretty much for granted by most city people as one of the minor annoyances you have to put up with as part of the price for living in the city. But as we learn more about the bad effects noise can have on people, and especially on the young, we realize that it is more than a simple annoyance and is really a major menace to health and well-being.

Q. Are you saying that we should try to do away with all noise in the city?

A. No. That is never going to happen. Some degree of noise will always be present in the city where people are moving about, working and playing. You will always have people talking, car engines running, streets being repaired, etc. However, it is when these noises reach a level where they have a physical and/or psychological

effect that there is reason to become alarmed and to do something about it.

Q. Exactly what kinds of damage can noise do to a person?

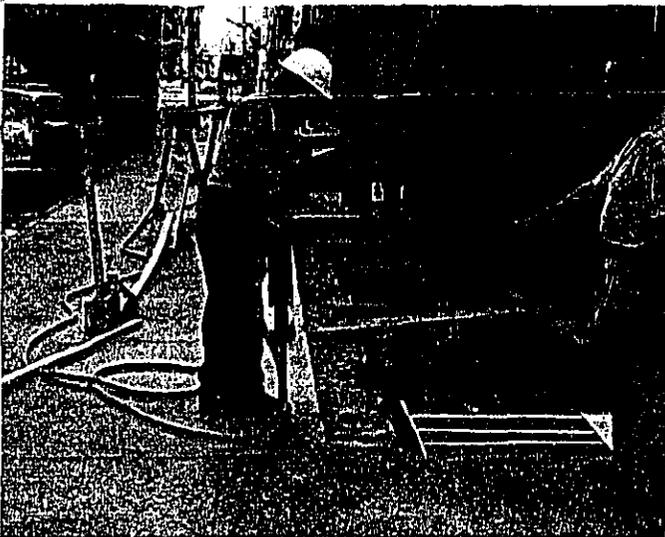
A. Scientific studies are still going on to answer this question. You have to realize that this is a fairly new field and all the answers are not in yet. However, there are certain things we do know.

1. Irritability, tenseness, insomnia and fatigue can all be caused by excessive noise.
2. Noise can cause your body to change. It can make your heart beat faster than normal, send your blood pressure up, cause your stomach to be unable to digest your food properly, and if it is loud enough, it can cause your gastric juices to flow and your saliva to stop. Remember when you were a child and you got so scared that your mouth went dry? Well, noise pollution can do the same thing to you.
3. Constant exposure to persistent noise can possibly help bring on such chronic stress diseases as high blood pressure or ulcers. It can also contribute to emotional stress reaction associated with mental disturbances.
4. Over a period of time, loud noises, such as those encountered in some industries, can cause a loss of hearing. Even moderately loud noise over extended periods of time can cause partial deafness.



It is estimated that over ten million Americans suffer from a hearing loss caused by noise where they work and that another 40 million people, not including workers, are exposed to potentially harmful noise levels without knowing it.

A striking example of people in this latter group is found in studies that have discovered that many young people who have been frequently exposed to loud disco music, have suffered some loss of hearing.



Q. Even if some loss of hearing does result because of noise, can't it be regained?

A. No, once hearing damage occurs, there is no cure. Contrary to common belief, hearing aids do not restore

noise-damaged hearing, although such aids can be of limited help to some people.

Q. How can the loss of hearing be detected?

A. Obviously through a medical examination but there are certain danger signs that you should be aware of. The first hint of possible hearing damage usually begins with the loss of occasional words in conversation and with difficulty in understanding people on the telephone. When hearing loss occurs, it is gradual in most cases, becoming worse with time.

Q. How can you tell when a noise is harmful to you?

A. The level of noise itself is measured by the use of mathematical units called "decibels," which are abbreviated "dB". The higher the dB, the more noise you have. For example, a soft whisper at 15 feet equals 30dB. At the other end of the scale, a stereo, turned up to full blast can go to 125 dB. Generally, you are in the danger area when the noise goes above 70 dB.

Some of the more common city noises are given below with their dB levels.

Refrigerator	40
Washing Machine	47 to 79
Alarm Clock	80
Traffic	80
Jackhammer	90
Garbage Truck	100

Subway100
 Disco 110 to 125

Q. Can't people learn to live with city noises?

A. Of course they can, but think about whether this is in their best interest. Let's look at two examples of how noise can effect people—one youngster, one adult.

Example A—Two boys are playing ball on the sidewalk of a busy city street. They are shouting at each other to be heard over the din of passing cars, a noisy bus, several blaring portable tape players, the sounds from a street repair crew, and the heavy thumps as an apartment house maintenance man deposits garbage cans at the curb.

Suddenly the ball bounces into the street. One of the youngsters dashes into the street and doesn't hear the cry of warning to look out for an approaching car. The boy has been around loud noises for so long that the shout doesn't do any good. He doesn't hear it. Fortunately, the car swerves and avoids hitting him but he could have been another traffic fatality.

At school, this hearing loss could reduce the boy's ability to understand and pronounce words correctly, thus making it difficult for him to learn and increasing the possibility of failure.

And finally, children who live and play in noisy surroundings may never develop the ability to listen well enough to learn once they are of school age.



Example B—After a day spent running a lathe in a noisy machine shop, Will Jones boards a subway for the 20 minute ride home. He sits next to two men who are talking and laughing loudly, to overcome the din of the clanking train. When he reaches his apartment his next door neighbor has his television turned up full blast, and to add to the racket his three children are engaged in a top of the lungs shouting match. Even when he goes to bed, the noise doesn't end. For most of the night, flight paths of departing jets are directly over his apartment building.

He starts the next day, tired, irritated and angry. He doesn't know the reason. Noise is the culprit.



Q. Granted that city noise is a major problem, what can a single individual do about it?

A. Probably much more than you would imagine since it takes the efforts of concerned people, like yourself, to ever get anything done. There are two directions in which to go—within your own community and within your own home.

In Your Community

- Begin by becoming aware of the noises within your own area and identify those that you believe to be harmful to you and your neighbors.

- Alert your friends and members of groups to which you belong, such as a church, block club, or social organization to your findings and join with them in bringing the problem to the attention of the proper city officials and demanding action.

- Visit your child's school and talk with school officials about any noise problems that you come across.

In Your Home

- Make it a rule not to slam doors and to keep radios, stereo and television sets at a level where they can be heard, but will not disturb your neighbor.

- If possible, use carpeting in areas where there is a lot of foot traffic. This helps keep down noise.

- Use a foam pad under blenders and mixers.

- Use caution in buying children's toys that can make loud or explosive sounds. Some can cause permanent ear injury.

- Compare, if possible, the noise outputs of different makes of an appliance before making your selection. Pick the one that makes the least noise.

■ Pay careful attention to your child's hearing. Listen closely and if he or she is asking the same question of you over and over again or at times doesn't seem to hear you, seek medical advice.

■ Teach your children about noise pollution and make them aware of the fact that it does affect them.

■ When it's time for the children to study, keep the house as quiet as you can. It will help them concentrate on their work.

Conclusion

Noise pollution is one of the most serious and unnoticed problems that exists today. It is taken for granted that much of the sound—the noise that surrounds us daily—is necessary, but much of it isn't. Much of it is affecting us in ways that we rarely think about, and in ways that are detrimental and that can and do hurt us.

It is time we confront noise pollution, really thinking about it and attacking it as a problem that affects not only ourselves but our children as well.

And you can play a big role in helping combat the problem by doing your part. Keep in mind these few simple guidelines.

■ Noise pollution may be harmful to your physical and mental health.

■ Protect your hearing. No one else can do this for you.

■ Sound condition your home.

■ Buy quiet.

■ Don't contribute to noise pollution.

For more information about "Noise Pollution" Contact:

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