

Summer 2001

THE Quiet Zone

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the premier issue of The Quiet Zone. The Quiet Zone is Noise Pollution Clearinghouse's effort to stay in contact with you, the grassroots community that is forming to quiet our noisy environment. We're hoping to keep you updated on what NPC is doing, the new resources we have available, and the latest news on the quiet front.

In this issue of The Quiet Zone we report on the increasing attention the media has given to the issues of noise and quiet, a creative way to fight noise polluters with their own noise, what's new in our Online Library, and the 20 noises we can do without.

We hope you find The Quiet Zone informative, helpful, and inspirational. We welcome any comments or suggestions.

Yours for a quieter world,
Les Blomberg, Executive Director

The Quiet Zone

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The Quiet Zone is published twice a year by the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating more livable civil cities and more natural rural and wilderness areas by reducing noise pollution at the source.



Narrowing the list of noises we can do without to twenty is nearly impossible. There are just too many candidates. Nevertheless, here is the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse's list. Like litter on the landscape, these noises pollute our soundscape. But to make it into Nap's top twenty requires something extra: a complete disregard for neighbors, a huge profit at the expense of others, a noise as pointless as a fire alarm in hell, or a noise with a solution as simple as a muffler. These are all noises we can do without.

RACE TRACKS: Heard more than five miles away, their noise is impossible for neighbors to escape, and could be eliminated with technology as old as the automobile: the muffler.

CAR ALARMS: These devices shriek, "Go steal someone else's car." They serve no social purpose. They don't reduce crime; they don't catch criminals; they only tell the thief to steal the next car. Police don't receive tips on car thieves because of car alarms, only complaints about the noise from false alarms.

VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT SIRENS: Not to be confused with the sirens on the trucks (although they are annoying too), these large stationary sirens were once used to call volunteer firemen to the station to respond to a fire. With modern telecommunications technology, pagers, and radios that can direct emergency personnel right to the fire, these sirens are now used to announce to the community that the fire department is again rushing into a burning building - something the local paper will headline the next day.

MOTORCYCLES WITHOUT MUFFLERS: Heard on every road, illegal in every state, this problem is the complement of fire siren noise. Instead of an ear-piercing noise served up by the local emergency service, this noise results when the police don't enforce existing laws.

TRUCKS: Even without the noise, our nation's reliance on big trucks is ridiculous. Big rigs are inefficient, polluting, involved in a disproportionate number of fatal accidents, and cause most of the damage to roads. To add insult to injury, they would be half as loud if the United States would only adopt European noise standards.

GARBAGE TRUCKS: Twenty years ago, the EPA was going to require quieter garbage trucks. Eventually the government was going to quiet hundreds of other products too. It would be a much quieter place today if it weren't for trash haulers' underworld influence and Ronald Reagan's dislike for all things

environmental. As a result of their combined efforts, the EPA's noise office was closed in 1981, and measures to quiet garbage trucks and other products ended up in the trash.

TRAIN HORNS: The train horn is a romantic sound, unless you live near the tracks. Then it's totally unnecessary, and so is the lost sleep. Warning cars of approaching trains doesn't require 100 plus decibels; crossing gates with flashing lights work just fine.

NIGHT FLIGHTS: For thousands of people living near airports, a quiet night's sleep is only a dream. Air cargo (which has grown 2,400% since 1960) and redeye flights cause redeye for thousands of airport neighbors. Sending overnight mail or flying on a plane that takes off or lands between 10 PM and 7 AM is like driving through residential neighborhoods at night honking the horn. It should be something that no civilized and civil human inflicts on another.

AIR TOURISM OVER NATIONAL PARKS: Pristine wilderness with an urban soundscape! Not exactly what you look for in a National Park. Yet the FAA insists that the Park ends where the birds begin, that pilots and sightseers, who don't even pay an entrance fee, are free to buzz our national treasures.

JET SKIS: Lakes and rivers already have enough mosquitoes.

LEAF BLOWERS: Good technology improves our quality of life by allowing us to do things better or more efficiently. The leaf blower is bad technology. It spews noise and air pollution from a dirty two-cycle engine in order to blow leaves and dirt into the air. The leaf blower doesn't pick up a single leaf, but its noise damages the hearing of the operator and the peace of the neighborhood, while the particulate pollution blown into the air first aggravates allergies and irritates lungs, and then settles down on sidewalks and driveways, waiting to be blown back into the air again.

GUN RANGES: Where do you site a facility designed to scatter lead and noise throughout the environment? Okay, that was a trick question. How about this one: What does the NRA seek for gun ranges that cannot meet community noise standards? Exemptions from regulation.

COMMERCIAL AIR-CONDITIONERS: When it is unbearably hot, they make the owner's building more comfortable. Too often, however, they make life for neighbors unbearable, cycling on and off, causing a distracting racket during the day and waking up neighbors at night. These big rooftop units on large buildings (and sometimes the smaller window and central air-conditioners), when improperly designed and inappropriately sited, are the ultimate bad-neighbor machine, making the owner more comfortable at his neighbors discomfort.

LOUD CHILDREN'S TOYS: Let's produce and market a toy that damages children's hearing. It could only happen in America, where the maximum noise limit is 140 decibels. Why not just park the kids in front of a 110-decibel rock concert speaker? It's quieter.

BOOM CARS: "DISTURB the peace." That's Sony Corporation's trademark, used to market incivility

along with their line of car stereos that offer "all-new ways to OFFEND." These rock concerts on wheels are unsafe to people both inside and out of the vehicle. If you can hear the car coming from a block away, you can be sure that the driver won't hear a police, fire, or ambulance siren. Nor will he hear anything in a couple of years.

NIGHT CLUBS AND CONCERTS: We know loud concerts harm hearing. Rock musicians who have hearing loss have even formed an organization to encourage other musicians to use earplugs. If instead, they turned it down a few decibels, they and their fans could still enjoy the music in 40 years.

MOVIE TRAILERS: These are ads for a movie that come before the feature, played at levels sufficient to damage your hearing, all in order to convince you to go to another movie that will also damage your hearing.

CONSTANTLY BARKING DOGS: Why does a dog, left alone chained to a tree, bark incessantly? Why does a dog owner, someone who cares about this animal, if not his neighbors, leave it chained and barking? Bring it in.

CELL PHONES IN PUBLIC PLACES: Courtrooms, classrooms, concert halls, theaters, as well as trains and restaurants - when did we stop teaching manners?

NIGHTTIME CHURCH BELLS: Speaking of manners, these are the people who are supposed to treat their neighbors as they would like to be treated. Yet in neighbors' houses, church bells are as loud as an alarm clock, and ring every hour..

DEDICATION

On February 13, 2001 two police officers responding to a noise complaint in a Centreville, Maryland trailer park were shot and killed by a resident who neighbors claimed was playing a stereo too loud. Officer Jason Schwenz, 28, died at the scene. Officer Michael Nickerson, 24, died an hour after the shooting while undergoing emergency surgery.

By choosing to quiet their surroundings, the assailant's neighbors called the police for help and in doing so a tragedy was played out that left two innocent men dead. This premier issue of The Quiet Zone is dedicated to these two men whose lives were stolen as they tried to keep the peace.

You Can't Buy Quiet...

One of the main reasons for the public's growing awareness of noise, as a community and environmental problem, is that more and more people are realizing that you can no longer buy quiet. Fifty years ago, anyone with means who wanted quiet could flee noisy cities for quieter suburbs. But those undertaking the urban exodus didn't leave the urban soundscape behind; they took the noise with them.



Larger suburban lawns meant larger lawnmowers, and spurred a host of noisy inventions such as the weed wacker and the leaf blower. Noisy highways were built in the peaceful suburbs and countryside to zip workers back to the city. And airport expansion made anyone within 30 miles of an airport one flight path change away from aggravating days and sleepless nights.

...But You Can Contribute to a Quieter World

What's changed in the last fifty years is that for the vast majority of citizens, a quiet environment can no longer be purchased; creating a quiet environment has become a community effort, a political and educational undertaking. That's how NPC contributes. NPC is the only grassroots organization dedicated solely to creating more livable cities and more natural rural and wilderness areas by reducing noise. We are leading and organizing the effort to quiet the cacophony of modern life. You can join us; we need your contribution. Last year we raised \$165,000. That's about the cost of one ad in Sony Corporation's "DISTURB the peace"™ campaign: designed to market incivility and very loud car stereo systems that offer "all new ways to offend." Although we may never have a budget like that of the noise polluters, with your help we can raise enough money to take them on. You can help to make it a fair fight. If you are able to help, use the return envelope to contribute to the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse.

Noise Gets Its Due

*"Noise speaks danger; it both threatens and invites aggression.
It triggers the physiological chemistry of the 'fight-or-flight' response.*

Before we were even human, noise signaled the approach of the carnivore, of lightning and lava. More recently, it became the alarm of invasion, first of the barbarian outside the gates and increasingly of the barbarian within. The audio-terrorist turns into decibels the dynamics of every relationship based on unrequited power: My noise can penetrate your quiet, but your quiet can never penetrate my noise."

Garret Keizer, Harper's, March 2001

For the first time in as long as we can remember, the national media are covering NOISE and QUIET, not just the conflicts that surround efforts to quiet specific noises. Two recent articles in major magazines and recent National Public Radio coverage mark an important change in the way noise is covered by the press and seen by the public. In the March issue of *Smithsonian* magazine, NPC was featured in an article aptly entitled "Noise Busters" by Richard and Joyce Wolkomir. The Wolkomirs visited NPC's office and followed Director Les Blomberg for three weeks in 2000-while we answered e-mails and questions, hosted a gun range noise conference, recorded a racetrack for the Know Noise CD (see accompanying article), studied aviation noise, and met with New York City anti-noise activists. The March issue of *Harper's* magazine (not to be confused

with *Harper's Bazaar* which coincidentally will also have an article on noise pollution in an upcoming issue) also contains a wonderfully lyrical article entitled "Sound and Fury: The Politics of Noise in a Loud Society." The article by Garret Keizer features several groups and individuals that have worked with NPC to reduce noise pollution. If you haven't seen these articles, we hope you'll visit one of our favorite sanctuaries from the din, your local library. And while you're there, make a copy for a friend. After your trip to the library, if you are still interested in national media attention, check out the archives of National Public Radio's Diane Rehm Show from Tuesday April 24th. Les Blomberg was a guest on the one-hour interview and call-in program. The show can be heard on the web using a RealAudio player at: [this link](#)



NPC and noise in general gained national attention this year with feature articles in Smithsonian and Harper's and a one hour-long call-in show on National Public Radio.

Fighting Noise Polluters with Their Own Noise

Activists Defeat Racetrack with NPC's Know Noise CD

The following is an excerpt from a letter we received about one community's effort to preserve its peace and quiet. They used NPC's Know Noise CD to score a great public relations victory. The CD is intended to allow citizens, city councils, planning commissions, etc. to hear the noises they discuss, permit, or regulate. The Know Noise CD, a sound system, and a sound level meter allow the existing or proposed noise levels to be reproduced. Often you don't need an expert to know that a noise is disturbing, just your ears. Against the odds, this group got their message heard.

As our group battled the construction of a racetrack, we quickly discovered that Montana lacks substantial zoning restrictions, a noise ordinance and a growth plan. There were no meetings with County Commissioners (they refused to be a part of it), but there was one public meeting held by the Motorsports Association who planned to build the track. Notice of the meeting was published in the paper one day before the actual meeting, but we quickly organized ourselves and turned out a large showing.

Each person entering the door was handed a paper that read, in part, "There is nothing you can do to stop the racetrack. It is going to happen." This statement motivated some citizens who had been previously uninvolved.

One member of our group volunteered her heavy duty sound system, and rented a generator to power it. On the day of the meeting, she set up the system in the parking lot outside of the meeting location. She started playing the recording of racetrack noise from the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse's Know Noise CD before the meeting started.

With the help of your staff, we determined the proper decibel level for playback. It drew a great amount of attention. One woman who lived one mile away said she hadn't heard about the meeting, but had come simply to find out what the noise was.

The Motorsports group unplugged the sound system once, but when one of our supporters plugged it in again the Motorsports group would not start their meeting (it was difficult to hear, even inside). Finally, the police were called and the system was turned off, but our point was well made.

We battled the Motorsports group for over a year after that meeting. With the help of several attorneys, they were eventually defeated.

Our many thanks to NPC for your invaluable advice, the information we found on your website, the noise recording, and your willingness to help in many ways.

NPC will be adding to its CD library of noises as funding allows. This year we hope to record examples of the Twenty Noises We Can Do Without (see first article).



OH, MY Aching Ears

Noise is unwanted sound. The derivation of the word "noise" says it all - it comes from the Latin word "nausea," meaning "seasickness." As its name suggests, noise has many unpleasant and harmful effects. It can cause hearing loss, stress, high blood pressure, sleep loss, lost productivity, and a general reduction in the quality of life and opportunity for personal and collective tranquility. In the words of former U.S. Surgeon General William H. Stewart, "Calling noise a nuisance is like calling smog an inconvenience. Noise must be considered a hazard to the health of people everywhere."

Noise is among the most pervasive pollutants today, and the problem is getting worse. In pre-industrial times, the loudest noise was thunder. Today, however, we are continually exposed to louder and more frequent sounds. Noise from automobiles, aircraft, construction equipment, manufacturing processes, lawn mowers, and boom boxes-to name just a few sources-are among the unwanted sounds that are routinely broadcast into the air. And new sources of noise constantly present themselves. Leafblowers and jet skis are just two examples of noise sources that did not exist until very recently.

But the presence of noise in our natural, rural, and urban environments is not just a nuisance-it's a health hazard.

For example:

- Noise is a biological stressor that has negative effects on the entire physiological system, contributing to elevated blood pressure, and changes in blood chemistry.
- Noise is the leading cause of hearing loss, and for the 28 million Americans who have hearing problems, noise makes communication even more difficult and frustrating. Moreover, much of the hearing loss that people associate with aging is actually caused by noise exposure.
- Noise causes sleep disturbances, which cause a host of problems, including reduced job performance, mood changes, and increased risk of automobile accidents.
- Noise negatively affects one's ability to learn and concentrate. Studies have shown decreased reading ability and scholastic performance of school children exposed to noise. Another researcher recently found that noisy classrooms encourage children to tune out not only extraneous noises, but also the teacher, leading to attentional and/or behavioral problems. Studies of adults show poorer performance of complex tasks in noisy environments.
- Noise renders us less tolerant of frustration and numb to the needs of other people, further reducing our quality of life and the civility of society.



For more information on the health effects of noise, check out the NPC website!

In NPC's Online Library you will find these excellent resources on noise and health:

- **"NOISE AND ITS EFFECTS"** (Suter, 1991). This report, written by a leading noise expert, provides a comprehensive overview of the noise problem.
- **"NOISE EFFECTS HANDBOOK: A DESK REFERENCE TO HEALTH AND WELFARE EFFECTS OF NOISE"** (EPA, 1981). This handbook, from the EPA's Office of Noise Abatement and Control (now defunct), details the effects noise has on communication, sleep, and the community.
- **"COMMUNITY NOISE"** (WHO, 1995). Published by the World Health Organization, this is the most up to date overview of the effects of community noise.

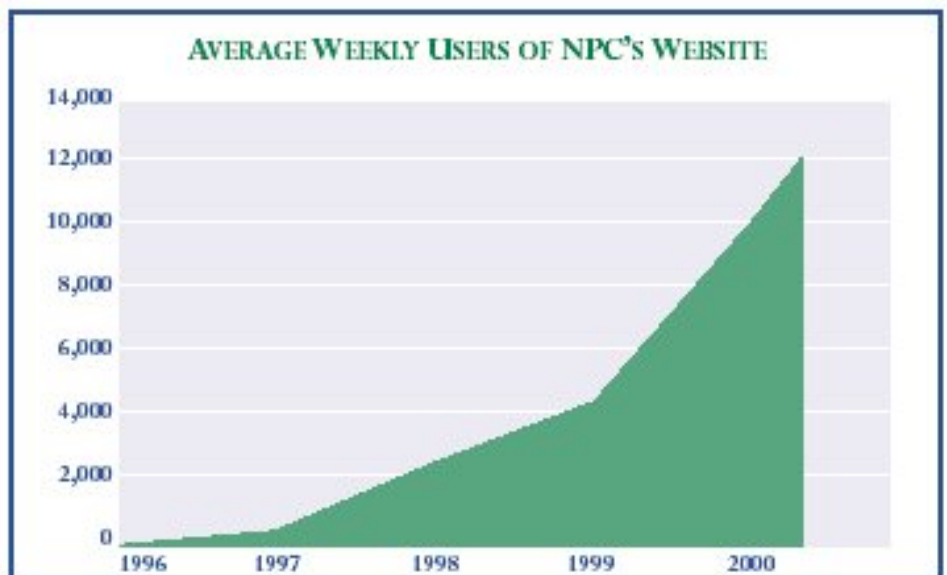
The Internet's Source for No Noise Information!

(<http://www.nonoise.org>)

NPC's website is one of the most important resources we have to offer persons with noise problems. The website provides valuable, sophisticated, and professional resources to individuals and groups who usually do not have access to such information. Growing numbers of citizens are discovering the NPC website as they work toward creating a quieter, more livable society.

The six main features of the website are:

- *NPC's Online Library which contains scientific reports, papers, fact sheets, etc., on important noise related topics;*
- *NPC's Law Library which contains relevant national, state, and local laws and legislation regarding noise pollution;*
- *NPC's Noise News which features summaries of articles concerning noise pollution that appear in*



major newspapers and journals throughout the nation and world;

- *[NPC's Resource Page](#) which contains resources for teachers, students, journalists, and activists;*
- *[NPC's Quietnet](#) which is a collection of websites that the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse hosts for smaller noise groups;*
- *[NPC's Hearing Loss and Occupational Noise Library](#), our most recent feature, which is geared at reducing hearing loss.*

The latest major additions to our Online Library include:

- *["Noise, Civility and Sovereignty,"](#) written by NPC's Director, focuses noise issues around two important questions: "How should we treat our neighbor?" and "Who owns the air and does anyone have a right to pollute it?"*
- *An article entitled ["Environmental Noise: the Invisible Pollutant,"](#) written by two well-respected noise experts.*
- *A 60+ page [Environmental Noise](#) booklet from Bruer and Kjaer, is a primer for those who want to learn about environmental noise, how it's measured, and what you can do about it.*
- *["Typical Noise Levels,"](#) which compares household and environmental noise levels.*
- *["Classroom Acoustics,"](#) a booklet that describes the importance of a well-designed classroom to learning.*

Check it out!