

to: Stan Durkee

noise report

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Buying quiet

Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul are using their joint purchasing powers to leverage quiet at the product source. Their "Buy Quiet" campaign is unique but not new. It is based on a concept familiar to municipal government.

The National League of Cities (NLC) for years has encouraged cities through its National Municipal Policy to use their purchasing powers to promote product noise reduction. State and local government expenditures for goods and services are substantial — exceeding \$100 billion in 1976. Because competition is at the heart of any procurement, it is clear that such a tremendous volume of expenditures has the potential to wield considerable influence on the design and manufacturing of the products cities purchase.

The "Buy Quiet" strategy of St. Paul and Ramsey County is part of a national movement being coordinated by the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP). Other governments involved in this program include New York City, the City of Chicago, the North Central Texas Council of Governments, the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Council of Governments, and the Scott County, Iowa Purchasing Association.

NIGP is a non-profit educational and technical society of governmental purchasing agencies. Its assistance to communities wishing to purchase quieter products is divided into four major areas: the Product Selection Process, the Data Bank for Quieter Purchasing, the Local Buy Quiet Programs Project, and the Quieter Products Division. The goal of "Buy Quiet" is to have cities purchase the quietest product for their dollars and to additionally encourage the makers of those products to "produce quiet" in the future.

An incorporated city is in many ways similar to a business in that it provides a multitude of services to the community and must make choices as to the quality of these services. Providing most of these services requires equipment obtained through some kind of formal procurement. As a city official charged with overseeing the contracting and procurement policies of your local unit of government, you can tailor your demand for goods and services with specifications in a procurement. In some cases, bid specifications can be made very exacting without worry that no vendor will make an offer.

In a 1979 issue of NLC's *Environmental Report*, it was noted that one city in California has incorporated into its adminis-

trative procedures a requirement that any goods purchased by the city comply with acceptable noise levels if the potential noise emissions from the type of product could pose a danger to the health and welfare of citizens. The classic example involved a bid request for several garbage trucks.

As far as any city official knew, no company within the market service area of the city manufactured a garbage truck which could meet the noise specification. Convinced that practical technology did exist to meet its demands, the city went ahead with the bid request. Sure enough, one national manufacturer was able to come up with a vehicle and compaction unit meeting the city's specification.

Here is a list of potentially noisy products for which a city might desire to establish acoustical bid specifications:

trucks	garbage trucks
automobiles	buses
motorcycles	bulldozers
compressors and generators	pneumatic drills
pumps	ambulances
engines	fire vehicles
fans and blowers	chippers
chain saws	lawn mowers
	air conditioners

This example is by no means a single, remote case. When the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) set out to purchase a large number of lawn mowers, a decision was made early in the procurement process to obtain the quietest and most affordable. It was a practical test of the goals and objectives of the "Buy Quiet" concept.

"It is clear that the root cause of urban noise problems results from the initial development and subsequent marketing and use of noisy products in urban areas," says the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "One question to be addressed, therefore, is how to

stimulate the introduction of available noise control technology into the design of marketed products."

Government regulation, setting noise limits for various products, is one method that has been used with some success. But it is felt that market incentives can complement federal regulatory activity.

For example, the character of products produced reflects, to a large extent, the response of producers to the demands and requirements of their major customers. Thus, the federal government has the opportunity to influence the character of products manufactured, either directly through incentives and specifications in its own procurements, or indirectly through information and cooperation with ultimate purchasers of consumer or industrial products.

In its purchase of quiet lawn mowers, GSA worked closely with the Experimental Technology Incentive Programs (ETIP) in the Department of Commerce and with EPA to create an incentive for manufacturers to provide a quiet lawn mower. It did this by applying a noise factor to a procurement for 10,000 mowers. The incentive provided a simple dollar-for-decibel advantage to manufacturers offering quieter lawn mowers.

GSA came out of this experiment with lawn mowers roughly half as loud as those normally purchased. Interestingly, the bulk purchase price for GSA to purchase the quieter mowers was approximately 30 percent lower than lawn mowers normally acquired.

This type of local administrative control of noise has several advantages:

1. It costs very little;
2. It sets a good example;
3. It establishes market pressures;
4. It begins the community quieting process.

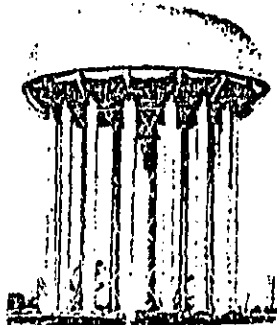
And most important of all, it is done without federal regulation. The market responds to demand naturally rather than artificially through a regulatory process.

Because of small contract volume, not all communities can successfully pressure contractors into providing quieter goods and services. A group of communities, however, can presumably leverage manufacturers of city-type products and providers of capital construction services which contract with more than one community. Thus, communities acting together can leverage the quality of supply because of the magnitude of demand.

Ramsey County and St. Paul are encouraging other governmental

purchasing agents to join them in their "Buy Quiet" program. Bill Peter, the purchasing agent for the city and county, has helped bring together purchasing agents from Anoka County, Hennepin County, the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Bloomington, and the State of Minnesota to begin to discuss the potential impacts their joint purchasing powers could wield. Peter also hopes to introduce the American Bar Association's Model Procurement Code as legislation this year — a bill would legitimize the use of quiet specifications. "We need to recognize the fact that the lowest bid is not always the best value for cities," Peter noted. "Other qualifications frequently need to be injected into the buying in order to make the best municipal purchase."

Quiet specifications for rotary power lawn mowers, trash compactors, pavement breakers, motorcycles, vacuum cleaners, and wheel and crawler tractors have already been developed by the NIGP. For more information on NIGP's "Buy Quiet" program contact Stephen Gordon, Director, Buy Quiet Program, NIGP, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 331-1357, or Kathleen Callahan, Noise Project Director, League of Minnesota Cities.



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