

THE Quiet Zone

Expanded Noise Testing

If we lived in Europe, we'd find our consumer products becoming quieter as they are increasingly regulated for noise and required to have noise labels (much like energy use labels on some products in the U.S.). The chances of this happening in the United States seem to be less than at anytime in the last 10 years.

The U.S. EPA Office of Noise Abatement and Control, which is charged with regulating and labeling noisy products, was closed by Ronald Reagan in 1981. It is becoming increasingly clear that the current Congress and administration have no interest in reopening this office.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

What we want is Peace and when we want it is now, but how we get it often takes hard work over many years. In this issue of the *Quiet Zone*, we examine three instances where patience and persistence are leading to Peace and Quiet.

NPC's Quiet Lawns project is now in its third year, and manufacturers are taking our efforts seriously and the public is finally learning which lawn mowers are quieter. Quieter lawn equipment provides the best hope for an improved suburban soundscape in the next ten years. No other suburban noise source can so easily and quickly be reduced. The evening and weekend chorus of lawnmowers and weedwhackers and leafblowers may soon be replaced by birds.

To build on the success of the Quiet Lawns project, this winter NPC tested quiet chainsaws. While a quiet chainsaw seems like an oxymoron, we found one where the dominant noise is the sound of the chain going around the bar.

Finally, we follow the patience and persistence of a local group of concerned citizens as they reclaim public ownership of an airport. Many hours of community activism overcame initial setbacks and entrenched opposition. This is just one example of the many groups and individuals we have helped

over the past eight years.

Also in this issue, we are also initiating a feature we are very excited about—This Quiet House. Like *This Old House*, This Quiet House will provide tips for quieting your home and neighborhood. James Cowan, a noise expert, begins the series with an article about protecting your home from exterior noise sources.

In this issue we've created a resource that we hope readers will want to keep around until they buy a new mower or decide to improve the noise control of their home. Therefore, we've organized the Quiet Lawns, Chainsaw, and Noise Control Special Reports as independent reports that can be removed and kept with your files, in your junk drawer, or wherever is convenient. If you already have a quiet lawnmower or are not going to buy a chainsaw, please pass that Report on to your friends, or give it to a local hardware store and ask them to stock quieter equipment.

Wishing you Peace and Quiet,



Les Blomberg,
Executive Director

Do unto others...

The failure of America's aviation noise policy to improve the quality of life around airports is at its heart a failure of decision makers to act ethically—to follow the Golden Rule. Airport boards of directors, airline executives, and FAA officials routinely fail to practice what they hear in church or in the synagogue on the Sabbath and what they probably teach to their kids the rest of the week. The people who make aviation noise policy decisions would never want to live with the consequences of those decisions—and they don't. And they don't treat others as they would like to be treated.

A forthcoming NPC report, "Noise the Industry Doesn't Hear, but Children and Communities Do" documents the problem of aviation decision-makers isolated from the consequences of their decisions, as well as how very different aviation noise policy would be if

decision-makers actually had to live with the effects of their decisions.

There are two obvious solutions to the ethical lapses of aviation noise policy-makers. One is to institute residency requirements. Just as many cities require that their employees live within the city limits, the FAA could require that their employees live within the 65 decibel zone

around airports, the area the FAA considers impacted. To be realistic, since you can't even get airports or the FAA to answer their noise complaint phone lines, it will be very hard to get them to move into a noisy neighborhood, but if they did, it would radically change aviation noise policy.

The other solution, the democratic solution, is to give the people in those noisy neighborhoods local control over their noisy neighbor, to make them the decision-makers. Here is the story of one group reasserting local control over an airport: It is also the story of persistence and patience in the face of disappointments. Finally, it is inspiring to all who are working to humanize our nation's aviation noise policy.

February 18, 2005

Dear NPC,

A few years ago I sent an email to you asking what we could do to our local airport in order to have them reduce the noise generated from that airport. Someone from your organization sent a detailed list of things we could do which were all pretty much through the public process. This list was very helpful.

Our local airport is a Special District (Enterprise District) in California. As such 5 elected directors govern this airport. Five years ago we ran a campaign to get 3 non-pilots who were sympathetic to the noise problem elected. Our best candidate came in 4th and 3 pilots were elected. Four years later the noise problem had become much worse and we ran another



This "photo" is from a Federal Aviation Administration instructional "Noise Course" slideshow, and was intended to be humorous. Airport neighbors aren't laughing.

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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 cities and more natural rural and wilderness areas by reducing noise pollution at the source.

campaign with many more people contributing talent and time. This time we won all three seats that were up for election. We now have three board members who are not pilots and are sympathetic to the community issues. These new board members were seated in December and are now moving slowly to develop plans that can relieve some of the noise issues with the airport.

I am a supporter of your efforts at Noise Pollution Clearinghouse and want to thank you for all of your work.

I also wanted you to know that we, out here in the trenches, are having some successes too.

Keep up the good work,
Name Withheld

Without local control, the people residing near airports are dependent on the charity of airport decision-makers in protecting their interests and quality of life. Charity, however, is a low priority for such a powerful, wealthy, special-interest laden industry.

NPC is dependent on your charity for our work. Fortunately, noise sufferers are much more generous than noise makers. NPC needs to raise an additional \$10,000 to complete, publish and publicize our report, Noise the Industry Doesn't Hear, but Children and Communities Do. The sooner we raise that money, the sooner we can expose the unethical behavior of the aviation noise industry, behavior that is condemned by our major religions. Please consider donating to this cause.

EXPANDED NOISE TESTING

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Unfortunately, without noise regulations, testing, and labeling, industry has little incentive to quiet its products. NPC is trying to change that. We're creating markets for quieter products by informing consumers so that they can purchase quieter ones, and we've created a venue for industry to promote their quieter products. While the "market" will not solve all noise problems, it can contribute much more than it is right now to the solution. No one goes out and shops for a noisy lawn mower, snow blower, refrigerator, etc. But right now, it is very hard, even for someone concerned about noise, to find and purchase a quiet one.

To that end, NPC is expanding its Quiet Lawns Project. We've done tests of 20 new gas powered walk-behind mowers (in addition to the 40 we've already tested) and a dozen riding mowers (see the green *Quiet Zone Special Report*). We've also tested 15 electric chainsaws (see the blue Quiet Zone Special Report). We're hoping that you can help them get wider exposure by bringing them to your local hardware store or sharing them with anyone in the market for a new mower or chainsaw. We're doing the same from our office with the national chain stores. Together, hopefully we can convince retailers to stock and promote quieter products, and identify them as such. And we're promoting the idea with the media. Last year our Quiet Lawns report was covered by the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Washington Post*.

NATIONAL HEARING CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION PRESENTS 2005 MEDIA AWARD TO NPC

The National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA) presented its 2005 Media award to the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse this winter at the 30th Annual NHCA Conference in Tucson, AZ.

NPC received the award for media exposure in 2004 in over 100 newspapers, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and others. NPC also appeared in several national magazines, including *Backpacker Magazine*, and had numerous radio and TV appearances.



The NHCA Media Award was established to recognize the efforts of those who heighten public awareness of the hazards of noise. The National Hearing Conservation Association, established in 1976, is dedicated to prevent hearing loss due to

noise and other environmental factors. For more information about NHCA, visit their website www.hearingconservation.org.

Les Blomberg receives the 2005 NHCA Media Award from Rick Neitzel (left) NHCA Director of Communication and Ted Madison (right) NHCA President.

Will Peace and Quiet Prevail?

Since the world is louder than it has ever been, it is easy to get discouraged about the prospects for a quieter world. There is more reason for hope than despair, however.

Much of the noise we experience is volitional—meant to turn heads, to say look at me, I’m here and you can’t do anything about it. But much of the noise we live with is a waste product of our technologically advanced society. Technology can also quiet noise sources. The muffler is as old as the motorcycle; air-conditioners can create a pleasant indoor environment without forcing neighbors to close their windows; and lawn equipment can make the “perfect” landscape without fouling the soundscape.

As a society, it has taken a long time for us to learn to throw our trash in the trash can, or better yet, to reduce, recycle, and reuse our trash. We are starting to understand that our aural litter, our audible trash is fouling our soundscape just as McDonald’s wrappers are fouling our landscape. While it is hard to imagine recycling or reusing noise, reducing it or containing it in an acoustical trash can is easy to do, and that too is starting to happen.

In the 21st Century we think people will choose the nice house in the quiet neighborhood over the nice house in the noisy neighborhood, the quiet refrigerator

over the noisy refrigerator, the quiet washer over the noisy one, and so on. Our bet is that no one really wants to announce to everyone in their house that they just flushed the toilet, and that no one really wants the entire neighborhood to know they are mowing their yard. The world will get quieter because people will choose it.

Cleaning up the aural waste of our technology will not stop those people who enjoy announcing their presence in the neighborhood. But it solves more than half the noise problem. It will make aural littering more obvious, more reprehensible, and ultimately less likely. Today, the McDonald’s wrappers that do reach our landscape do so when no one is watching. Rarely do people announce they are litterbugs. In the future, our hope is that, noise will litter our soundscape only when no one is listening.

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