

A Policy for Noise Pollution

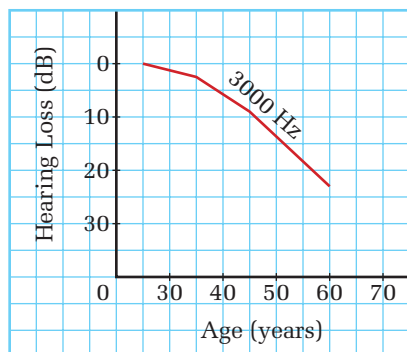


The environment is alive with sounds.

Background

Sounds that are continuous, or loud, or both, are called noise pollution. Air and road traffic, construction, and loud music, are common forms. The effects of noise pollution on hearing loss are well documented. Studies have found that people living in remote regions, far from the noises of an industrialized environment, have much better hearing in old age than people that have lived in urban settings. These studies suggest that although hearing loss may be a natural result of aging, external factors can also have a dramatic impact. Studies also suggest that noise pollution can have an effect on our emotional well-being. As a result, many towns and cities attempt to protect citizens by passing legislation aimed at regulating noise levels.

Hearing Loss with Age at 3000 Hz



In recent court proceedings brought by a town in British Columbia against a local company, noise pollution bylaws were put to the test. Because of the company's proximity to a residential area, bylaws prohibited the company staff from making noise outside the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekdays. Apparently, however, company personnel were routinely receiving shipments at 5:00 a.m., which prompted a group of angry residents to file a complaint. The judge in the case threw out the complaint, claiming the town's bylaws did not sufficiently define unacceptable noise. The judge further suggested that noise deemed annoying by one person could easily go unnoticed by another.

This case raises important questions about the planning and implementation of noise pollution bylaws. What constitutes acceptable versus unacceptable levels of noise? Who should have a say? What steps must municipal planners and lawmakers take to ensure that such bylaws do not unfairly discriminate against businesses, or prevent people from going about everyday tasks, while at the same time ensuring that residents of local communities have periods of quiet time?

Bearing these issues in mind, your task will be to apply your knowledge of waves and sound to draft a noise pollution policy for a specific community.



Many regions have by-laws governing when construction noise is allowed.

Plan and Present

1. As a class, establish clear guidelines for the finished product. Discuss specifics such as overall length, required sections, proper sourcing, and timelines.
2. In groups of three or four, brainstorm potential communities for which a noise pollution policy could be useful. Communities to consider include a hospital, an apartment building, a retirement residence, or your school. Each group should share its choice of community with the class.
3. Once your group has selected a community, begin identifying the stakeholders (any person or group that will be affected by the policy).
4. Develop your proposal by:
 - conducting experiments to determine current noise levels
 - interviewing stakeholders
 - researching existing policies
 - researching appropriate noise levels as prescribed by unbiased scientific studies
 - determining reasonable penalties for bylaw infractions



Logging vehicles are often restricted from operating during specific times of the day. In some areas seasonal operating restrictions also exist.

Evaluate

1. What components were common to each group's policy document, regardless of the community?
2. List three items that you found most interesting after analyzing all of the documents. Explain your selections.
3. Describe two challenges and two successes associated with your group's attempt to draft a useful and enforceable document.
4. Describe how you feel about noise pollution. Respond to the comment, "Societal noise regulation has often been left to individual municipalities because of the perception that noise pollution is simply an irritation."



Urban planners often set aside specific geographic regions for industrial, entertainment, and housing developments to help reduce problems one may cause another.