

From the Ministries

KOREA ANNOUNCES POLICY ON NOISE REDUCTION

Korea's Ministry of Environment has announced a comprehensive plan aimed at reducing noise in living spaces.

According to the plan, emphasis will be put on dealing with the sources of noise.

The policy includes regulations on construction of facilities that generate

noise or vibration in the vicinity of libraries, nurseries for senior citizens, or communal houses. Also among the measures are the introduction of labeling of noise levels on home appliances such as washing machines and imposition of higher fines on violations of traffic noise regulations.

THAILAND RESETS VEHICLE NOISE STANDARDS

The Thai Industrial Standards Institute (TISI) is co-operating with automotive companies to reset vehicle noise standards in an attempt to curb pollution and ensure safety, says secretary-general Chaiyong Krittapholchai. The move came after TISI received many complaints about loud exhaust noise. According to TISI standards, and random checks conducted by the TISI, cars rolling out of factories need to have an engine sound level of not more than 100 decibels(A) at a 0.5 metre distance from the vehicle, and with 95 dB(A) for motorcycles. Used cars are inspected by the Land Transport Department, and studies concerning new standards for new vehicles will be proposed later for

the National Environment Board to consider. TISI is also in the process of setting safety standards for engines installed with natural gas tanks for fuel. Currently there are only standards for diesel, benzene and gasohol engines.

It is also studying engine standards to support the use of Euro 4 vehicle standards that will be implemented in January 2012 to lower air pollution, especially sulphur substances, in fuel.

Vallop Tiasiri, director of the Thailand Automotive Institute, said the institute agrees with TISI's standards, but the testing should be changed to while cars are running instead of parked. TISI needs to set up a new testing centre for this alteration, but the government has not indicated any movement on this front, he said.

OSHA BACKS DOWN

The US Government is shelving a proposed change to workplace noise standards, following strong opposition to the proposals from manufacturers and some lawmakers.

The move comes just after President Barack Obama ordered executive agencies to review all pending regulations and assess whether they were overly burdensome to business.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration said it will withdraw a proposal to toughen requirements for what employers had to provide to protect workers' hearing in loud environments, by changing its

interpretation of what would be "feasible" for them.

Employers are currently allowed to provide personal protective equipment, such as ear plugs, rather than installing noise-dampening equipment or limiting the amount of time that workers can spend in noisy areas, if it is more cost-effective for them. OSHA wanted employers to prove that they would be put out of business by taking more expensive measures.

Trade groups and lawmakers had said that the cost of complying with the proposals would stop them from hiring additional workers.

David Michaels, assistant secretary of

labor for occupational safety and health, said in a statement that “hearing loss caused by excessive noise levels remains a serious occupational health problem in this country” but that the agency had

decided that “addressing this problem requires much more public outreach and many more resources than we had originally anticipated.”

NOISY CAR ORDINANCES - PROBLEMATIC?

Cities across the USA are increasingly using similar ordinances to impose fines and reduce noise from drivers that use loud car stereos. Other cities have stepped up enforcement in the past year, “because people don’t want their homes and businesses invaded by thumping at all hours of the day and night, causing them to lose sleep, get headaches, experience chronic fatigue and suffer stress,” according to Ted Reuter of Noise-Free America. The Nevada cities of Reno and Sparks adopted loud car stereo ordinances last June and September, respectively. Sparks Councilman Ron Smith says both ordinances make it a misdemeanor if a

car stereo is “plainly audible” to an officer from 25 feet or more. But it is the “plainly audible” test that is problematic, leading to many such ordinances being challenged on the grounds that “plainly audible” is an imprecise concept. Local authorities in the US, in many cases seriously short of funds have preferred wording of that kind to the comparatively expensive option of equipping the local police with noise meters. Another line of challenge is that an individual’s right to express himself (by for example playing his stereo at bone-shatteringly loud levels) is constitutionally protected; and the government has no right to curtail one party’s freedom for the benefit of other parties.

NATIONAL INTEREST TRUMPS NOISE

The NSW state government has approved a \$210 million third rail track from Maitland to Minimbah despite concerns about the noise impacts of more coal trains on existing and proposed housing in burgeoning suburbs. The approval imposed 69

conditions on the project including the need to draw up a noise management plan and undertake noise and vibration audits. It concluded the track, expected to boost capacity from 95 million tonnes of coal a year to up to 200 million tonnes, was vital infrastructure and in the public’s interest.

CITY CAN’T CONTROL QUARRY NOISE

The city of Fayetteville, Arkansas, can’t enforce a new ordinance regulating rock quarries in and around city limits while a legal challenge is pending, a federal appeals court has ruled. The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a decision from U.S. District Judge Jimm Larry Hendren, who issued an injunction last year that stopped the city from enforcing the ordinance while Rogers Group Inc. challenges the regulations in court. Rogers Group operates quarries in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Indiana and Tennessee. The

Fayetteville City Council passed the ordinance in 2009, after receiving noise and vibration complaints from people who live near rock quarries. The measure affected quarries within a mile of city limits. The city argued that it could regulate the Rogers rock quarry, located within a mile of city limits in Washington County, because it has such power over nuisances. But the 8th Circuit found that a court must declare the quarry a nuisance for the city to have regulatory power over the unincorporated area. “Absent a judicial determination that the quarry’s activities constitute a nuisance, the city has no

statutory authority to regulate the quarry in the guise of abating a nuisance,” the appeals court said in its opinion. The ordinance passed by the city requires quarry operators to obtain a license from the city, and it limits quarry operations to 60 hours per work. The ordinance limits “major noise producing activities” to between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and it restricts rock blasting to a five-hour period on the first and third Wednesday of each month.

Darin Matson, Rogers Group’s vice president of aggregate operations, testified that the company would lose about \$13,000 per week under the restrictions. He also said that the company would lose business to other quarry operators in northwest Arkansas who aren’t subject to Fayetteville’s regulations. The 8th Circuit upheld Hendren’s ruling that Rogers Group would suffer irreparable harm if the city’s ordinance went into effect.

COMPENSATION CORNER

A former teacher has been awarded £150,000 in personal injury compensation after she developed problems with her voicebox due to having due shout repeatedly. Joyce Walters, 50, was a teacher of English for foreign students at an adult education college in Hillingdon, north-west London and was given a classroom next to a courtyard used by primary school children. As a result of the noise, Ms Walters said she constantly had to raise her voice in order to be heard when the children were at play, a problem that was made worse by the fact that she had to enunciate clearly in order to be understood by non-English speakers. Despite complaining to the council, nothing was done and Ms Joyce eventually developed nodules on her vocal cords. She now cannot speak for more than a short period without her voice becoming hoarse and has had to undergo extensive speech therapy. “I adored the classroom and miss it so much, but the problems with my voice make it impossible for me to ever go back,” she commented. After lodging a personal injury claim against Hillingdon Council, Ms Joyce has now been awarded £150,000, a figure which is thought to be the largest settlement of its kind.

POTTERS TO SUE FOR LONG LOST HEARING

Former ceramic workers are on the verge of going to court to demand compensation from firms who they claim made them deaf. The potters could be in line for up to £10,000 each if they are successful in their claims. Hundreds of ex-potters contacted Stoke solicitors Irwin Mitchell Solicitors for advice after former workers with suitable cases could be in line for thousands of pounds in compensation. From those who made enquiries, 17 were invited to attend a special hearing-loss clinic. The independent testing was held to assess the extent of damage and provide evidence of whether it was caused in the workplace. If the results of the tests prove that the applicants’ hearing has been damaged beyond what would be expected through natural ageing, the lawyers will start legal action. Mark Allen, head of Irwin Mitchell’s industrial deafness team, said “We know that some of the biggest employers in the pottery industry have, over the years, breached noise levels in their factories. “The legacy of this is a generation of workers who are now suffering noise-induced hearing loss and tinnitus, which has greatly affected their quality of life. “The pottery industry was not alone in failing to protect its employees and workers in other industries often suffer the same problems.”

NOISY HOME STUNTS SPEECH

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, young British children are starting preschool unable to speak and listen properly because of continuous noise and poor conversation at home, a report has found. Constantly switched on televisions, noisy brothers and sisters and raised voices are increasingly hampering children's language skills, it says. The study, on how the best schools teach children to read, says some schools report spending days or weeks educating parents and improving children's social skills. It says: "The majority of the schools visited that had nursery classes commented that, increasingly, children joined unprepared for learning and with poor listening and speaking skills." The study adds: "The schools attributed weak listening skills not only to poor conversation in the home but, very often, also to continuous background noise, such as constant television, the noise of siblings and raised voices, which are bound to dull sensitivity to the nuances of sounds."

WIND TURBINES AND LFN: MORE RESEARCH NEEDED

Australia's wind farm industry is restricted by some of the world's toughest and most up-to-date noise controls, a new report says. It also says there is no evidence residents living near operational wind farms will suffer any adverse health effects. "There is extensive evidence indicating noise from wind farms developed and operated in accordance with current standards and guidelines will not have any direct adverse health effects," the report says. Australian Environmental Foundation executive director Max Rheese is prepared to agree the evidence is lacking. But Mr Rheese said that was only because there has not been enough research taking place. "Wind farms are a relatively new phenomena in Victoria and it will take at least five years for a study to have measurable results," Mr Rheese said.

'WHISPER BRAKES' TO REDUCE TRAIN NOISE

German national rail provider Deutsche Bahn has announced that it will outfit its freight train fleet with quieter brakes in an effort to cut noise and the costs of protective walls in residential areas. "The noise is the Achilles heel of freight train traffic," Deutsche Bahn CEO Rüdiger Grube said "We must fight it at the source." In the coming months the company plans to put "whisper brakes" on 1,250 of its 100,000 freight cars, he said. With each car costing between €2,000 and €7,000, the German government has set aside some €7.5 million of the project, while the company will pay for the rest. From now on, the company has said that all new freight cars will be outfitted with the special brakes. The first 6,000 have already been ordered, Grube said. According to the CEO, the new fibre composite brakes will cut train noise pollution in half by reducing the friction between wheels and tracks.

MISSION CREEP

London City Airport was originally granted planning permission on the basis it would only have a small number of flights by low-noise turbo-prop planes designed for short take-off and landing. It now plans to increase the number of flights to 176,000 a year and are using much noisier jet aircraft for over 90% of flights.

WATER DROWNS BLASTING VIBRATION

MTR Corp has adopted a new method to suppress noise and vibrations during tunnelling work for the West Island Line, Hong Kong. Instead of using sandbags and tires to cover the explosives, the 60-meter shaft is filled with water to 1.5 meters deep to contain the blasting shocks. The shaft is in the King George V Memorial Park above the future station at Sai Ying Pun. "It is the first time for Hong Kong to have water as the blast ballast in a vertical construction shaft," senior construction engineer Walter Lam Wai-tak said. "This new technology can significantly reduce noise and vibration caused by the blasting in the densely populated district."

NOISE: BAD FOR BATS

Researchers in Germany found that road noise affected the bats' ability to listen for the "rustling sound" of the beetles and spiders they feed on. This is the first study to examine the impact of traffic on predators that listen for their prey. The researchers report in the Royal Society journal Proceedings B that the same effect could be true for other "acoustic predators", including owls. Greater mouse-eared bats eat large, ground-running creatures, such as carabid beetles, hunting spiders and centipedes. With their remarkably sensitive hearing, the bats detect and track down their prey by listening for the faint rustling sounds they produce when walking. The bats are protected under the European Habitats directive, so the scientists' aim was to measure how any planned highways might affect their habitat. The finding was that traffic noise affects an area of 50-60m either side of a highway, in which bats' foraging abilities are significantly reduced.

