

# Noise costs

Assessment of environmental costs is gaining importance, whether the costs of controlling global warming, costs of decommissioning polluting installations or the environmental costs of energy production. These environmental costs are widespread and include the material and energy to produce goods, the costs of dealing with the waste from these, by disposal or storage, the environmental costs of distribution and the costs of compliance with environmental regulation.

However, there are also non-invoiced costs. Some years ago a European Commission Report concluded that the real, non-invoiced, environmental and health costs of electricity generation represents 1-2% of the EU's gross domestic product. Attributing the costs directly to their source would lead to a doubling of the cost for electricity from coal and a 30% increase in that from gas. Similarly, the costs of road accidents is a non-invoiced cost of transportation.

A non-invoiced environmental cost is the cost of noise pollution. Just a few examples are:

- Deterioration in school children's learning,
- Effects on sleep of night time noise disturbance,
- Costs to health services of stress and other noise induced illness.

Earlier indications that persistent noise stress from traffic increases the risk of cardiovascular disorders are now becoming an established fact<sup>1</sup>. This is not surprising, when the emotions associated with environmental noise include anger, mistrust and frustration.

Early June, 9.5 million Chinese students sat competitive examinations for 5.6 million university places. In some areas concerned parents had planes diverted. Having endured years of education under the flight path, they knew how concentration could be disturbed by aircraft noise and said "NO" when it came to exam time. In other areas parents had construction work stopped to prevent noise affecting the exams. They knew that noise might cost their son's and daughters' future.

The cost of environmental noise is spread thinly amongst millions of people. If it could be gathered up into one account, and compensated for, attitudes to noise control might be considerably sharpened.

<sup>1</sup>W Babisch Transportation noise and cardiovascular risk: Updated Review and synthesis of epidemiological studies indicate that the evidence has increased. *Noise and Health* Vol. 8, 1-29, 2006

