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Noise in 2009

As noise control becomes a luxury when times are difficult, it is likely to be one of the victims of the continuing economic problems, which we anticipate in 2009. Some noise work will be affected: can manufacturers continue to reduce the noise of products which are not selling well? Noise control hardware, particularly for office and commercial buildings, will be hit. But as safety cannot be compromised, health related noise control should continue to develop.

The recession may see delays in airport developments, perhaps the end of some schemes, achieving more than all the protestors have over their many years of objecting. Even if approval is given now, Heathrow might not have its third runway or, at least, see delays, as a fall in traffic strengthens arguments against extension. Of course, public infrastructure works are a method for a country to work its way out of a recession and large projects bring noise prediction work.

2009 may be the year when noise maps come into their own. Having spent the money already, much head scratching will continue about what to do with these maps, which now cover many of the larger conurbations of Europe. The EU Environmental Directive (END) focuses on the impact of noise on individuals, in contrast to previous EU legislation, which set standards for noise emissions from sources. Noise mapping is used to determine exposure to environmental noise and its effects on the public. It is intended that action plans will follow, based upon noise mapping results, so that noise and its effects can be managed. So far we have seen little of this, but noise maps might soon move off the computer screen into useful application. This will be a relatively low-cost planning exercise. Without progress in applying them to real problems, noise maps will sink into the “to be quietly forgotten” folder

Will 2009 see any change in criteria? Particularly the current practice of setting criteria at levels for which it is known that, say, 10% to 20% of those affected are annoyed. This means that the sensitives carry their problems for the sake of the remainder of us. Can we continue to justify this? Perhaps not, but the economics will.

2009 may be a year of reflection on noise, perhaps consolidation, whilst the basis for better times is quietly laid.

NEW NOISE CODE INCREASES COMPLAINTS

Since New York's new noise code started in July, 135 589 noise complaints have been made to the city's 311 hotline as of Nov. 29 – a 13% increase over the same period last year. “People know there is more enforcement and that provides a deterrence, which is the point of the noise code,” said Eric Zwelling, director of Rutgers University Noise Technical Assistance Center and a consultant on the noise code. He said the spike in complaints either suggests the city is getting noisier or there is more awareness that loud noises are against the law. The top culprit remains “noise from a neighbour.”

MUSIC TRACKS

Japanese researchers have turned road noise into music after discovering that grooves etched into the surface of the road resonate inside cars as musical notes. By gauging the distance between the grooves and their depth a team from the Hokkaido Industrial Research Institute has been able to transmit the sound through the wheels of the vehicle into the passenger compartment. Roads in three parts of northern Japan have been cut at precise distances in the asphalt. They were marked with bright musical notes to alert motorists to the unusual in-car entertainment they were about to experience. Opinions among those who have test-driven the “melody road” vary, with some saying the noise produced is more of a “rumble” than a tune, while others saying that they could virtually sing along. The optimum listening speed is 28mph and speeding up or slowing down during the 30-second performance inevitably affects the tempo. In zones where speed limits are restricted to 30mph, however, melody roads might be effective in encouraging drivers to remain below the limit.