

From the Ministries

NOISE PROBLEMS UNDER-ESTIMATED IN GERMANY

“Noise is the most heavily underestimated environmental problem in Germany,” says Jochen Flasbarth, president of the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA). In a representative

survey conducted by the agency in 2010, half of all respondents complained about road noise while one in three objected to aircraft noise. And residents’ sensitivity to noise has only increased since then, says René Weinandy, a noise expert at the UBA.

12,000 NOISE COMPLAINTS, JUST 7 PROSECUTIONS

In Northern Ireland last year, even though more than 12,000 complaints

were made and over 650 fines and official warnings were handed out only 7 people were prosecuted.

EXEMPTING WHO WE LIKE FROM NOISE REGULATIONS

City officials in Wapello (Iowa) understand the enthusiasm generated at high school football games and have decided to exempt the local high school football field from following the city’s

noise ordinance. The City Council at its meeting 3rd October agreed to allow the stadium to be noisy but asked school officials to try to keep it down. Officials say recent tests during two home football games showed sound levels exceeding the city’s noise ordinance.

ENVIRONMENT MEPS BACK LAW TO TURN DOWN HARMFUL TRAFFIC NOISE

Noise limits for cars would be tightened to protect public health, under a draft law agreed with EU ministers and endorsed by the Environment Committee of the European Parliament at the end of November. As proposed by MEPs during negotiations, the text calls for the introduction of labels to inform consumers about the noise levels of new cars and the addition of sound to hybrid and electric vehicles to alert pedestrians. “I consider the final text adopted under the negotiations as an optimal compromise that will contribute to the protection of health in our European citizens. On the other hand, it should not cause any loss of competitiveness for the European automotive industry. I

believe the proposal finds broad support across the political groups in the European Parliament,” said the rapporteur, Miroslav Ouzky (ECR, CZ).

The draft rules would phase in new limits two, four and ten years after the new rules come into force. The first phase would apply to new vehicle types. The second and the third phases would also apply to all new vehicles produced. The limit for standard cars would be reduced to 68 db in 12 years, from the current level of 74 db. More powerful vehicles would be allowed a margin of 1 to 9 extra decibels. The text lowers the limit for the most powerful heavy lorries (over 12 tonnes) to 79 db from 81 db. MEPs recognise that vehicle noise is also affected by the road surface and tyre noise.

NEW STATE LAW ADDRESSES SNOWMOBILE NOISE

New York State has established new standards for measuring snowmobile noise that will make it easier to enforce

the law. Approved in November by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, the law outlaws operating a snowmobile without a working muffler that keeps noise below 78 decibels at full throttle measured

from 50 feet away. It also bans snowmobiles putting out 88 decibels at 4,000 rpm as measured from about 12 feet behind a stationary sled with a sound meter microphone. The law had previously had requirements for the decibel level of snowmobiles measured from 50 feet away, but that the requirements were broken down into

categories based on when the snowmobiles were manufactured. The new law has the same decibel level requirement for all snowmobiles, regardless of when they were manufactured. The decibel level requirement for 12 feet away is an entirely new component of the law

IRELAND'S WTN GUIDELINES TO BE UPDATED

The Irish government have commissioned international company Marshall Day Acoustics to perform a study on windfarm noise to help with updating guidelines.

The study will take into account changes in turbine technology, other research into wind turbine noise, and Ireland's target to produce 40 percent renewable energy by 2020.

The company have previously advised on guideline reviews in Australia and New Zealand.

VERMONT TO REVIEW NOISE STANDARD FOR WIND TURBINES

This month, Vermont's Public Service Board will begin re-examining the standards it sets for noise created by energy generation, including wind

turbines. The Board says the review is triggered in part by ongoing complaints from neighbours of wind projects. The Board's spokesman said any change in standards would likely apply only to future projects, not to turbines already in place.

MAKING WIND NOISE ORDINANCE STAND UP IN COURT

Emmet County's (Fla) commissioners have recently been considering updating its 2009 ordinance which covered wind turbine noise. Currently, the ordinance sets a maximum noise level, at the

property line of the wind generation site, of 35 decibels. However, officials think this might invite a court challenge. Already turbine developers have called the present limit 'exclusionary zoning', compared to the 55dB guideline used by the state of Michigan.

LONDON FIRST CALLS FOR AIRCRAFT 'NOISE POLLUTION TSAR'

A London business group has called for a 'noise pollution tsar' to be appointed to protect people living under flightpaths. London First said that an independent ombudsman, with a range of powers including the ability to fine an airline that persistently broke noise pollution limits, would address a "basic lack of trust and transparency" between those pressing the economic case for airport expansion and local communities.

A similar scheme running in Paris since 2000 has issued in fines totalling more than more than 10m euros to airlines

and has the power to ground the aircraft of airlines that do not pay penalties.

The plan, set out in London First's More Flights, Less Noise report.

The London First report shows how noise levels under flightpaths are expected to fall as airlines invest in a new generation of quieter planes, but local communities and the public at large are unsure whether they will share the benefits.

Chief executive Baroness Jo Valentine said it was vital for the UK that airport capacity was increased, but she added that unless a basic lack of trust and transparency around noise levels was addressed head-on, it might never

happen.

“Limiting and cutting noise are challenges for any airport but the fact is that planes are getting quieter, major airlines like British Airways and Virgin are investing heavily in new fleets and airports are actively improving landing and take-off methods to reduce the noise impact,” she said.

“However, we are miles behind foreign rivals when it comes to communicating

how we monitor noise levels and deal with any problems.

“An independent ombudsman would make sure that all airlines fulfil their obligations. It would give local communities the assurance that someone is looking out for them and policy makers a source of objective information on which to make their decisions.”

WORKERS DENIED RIGHT TO SUE EMPLOYER FOR NOISE INDUCED HEARING LOSS

In the Louisiana Court of Appeal, (Arrant et al. vs Graphic Packaging International) the suit brought by workers and former workers against the employer, for noise induced hearing loss, has been dismissed. The employer argued that the workers should seek redress/remedy through workers compensation. The workers argued that workers compensation only covered

permanent hearing loss due to a single traumatic event, not the gradual and possibly partial hearing loss as a consequence of long term exposure to noise. The court rejected that interpretation, saying that workers compensation would provide some compensation of the claim proved, at least medical treatment. Whether the amount from workers compensation would be as much as damages from a successful suit against an employer, was not discussed.

TRAFFIC NOISE FRIGHTENS AWAY BIRDS

Scientists have found that the noise created by passing traffic causes birds to actively avoid areas afflicted by the sound. They created a “phantom road” in the middle of an area of roadless countryside by playing traffic noise over a set of speakers. They found that the abundance of birds in the area declined by more than a quarter. Two species avoided the areas where the sounds were played altogether. The scientists, who are based at Boise State University in Idaho, believe the noise of roads may drive birds away because it makes it harder for them to listen for predators and can mask their own songs. Dr Christopher McClure, a biologist at Boise State University who led the research, said: “Our results demonstrate that noise alone is enough to cause some birds to avoid a site - suggesting that road noise might be, in some instances, the main driver of the effects of roads on animals. “Migrating birds might strongly avoid noise because of their inherent mobility - they can easily avoid a noisy site, given there are other suitable, quieter areas nearby. “We substantially depleted the population of migratory birds and caused entire species to almost completely avoid an otherwise high-quality stopover site using only traffic noise - demonstrating that anthropogenic noise can alter the amount of habitat available to migratory birds during stopover.”

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NEW CAR VIBRATION SIMULATION RESEARCH PROJECT

Researchers at Nottingham Trent University are leading a a1.9 million study to develop software which would enable car manufacturers to accurately predict how a new model would respond to high levels of structural vibration caused by air resistance. This would allow them to identify any unwanted noises and address them at the design stage, dramatically cutting costs by removing the need to develop an expensive physical prototype. Controlling and minimising vibration and shaking would give manufacturers a crucial and competitive advantage in the drive for lower noise pollution levels and enhanced driver and passenger comfort. Avoiding high levels of vibration would also work to reduce wear and tear on the vehicle, saving motorists in repair costs. The four year European Union funded project also involves researchers from the University of Nottingham, University of Southampton and Jaguar Land Rover, along with specialist German SMEs inuTech GmbH and CDH AG. The aim is to create the first ever simulation tool which would model the precise structural vibrations of a vehicle over the whole range of frequencies audible to humans. The researchers hope to be able to provide a robust and detailed analysis of any vehicle’s vibrations on a very fine scale, taking into account the materials and intricate couplings between different components. This simulation would be implemented into the existing computer aided engineering toolkit, used by the automotive industry to reduce development time and cost, while improving safety, comfort and durability of vehicles. Engineers would enter the model’s parameters into the system to see a detailed visualisation of the car they are modelling - they could then see how the vibration levels would affect the vehicle. Dr David Chappell, a researcher in Nottingham Trent University’s School of Science and Technology, said. “Noise and vibration differs greatly vehicle-to-vehicle at high frequencies, but this modelling technique would be indispensable for manufacturers, with tightening legal regulations around noise pollution. The new technique has the potential to reduce costs by identifying vibration issues at the virtual design stage. Motorists and their passengers would also reap major benefits, with improved journey comfort.” The work is being funded by the European Commission’s FP7 People Specific Programme, Marie Curie Actions.

NOISE IS BIGGEST HOTEL COMPLAINT

Noise is the most common complaint by consumers staying in hotels in all but one out of 20 cities worldwide. Analysis by online reputation specialist ReviewPro of online guest reviews for 5,683 hotels found that noise gained more negative mentions than other complaints in all but one city (Cape Town).