

Nothing But The Truth?

It's difficult being a member of the public, trying hard to understand the nuances of noise. Where do you turn for help if you can't afford a consultant, or if you don't like the advice your consultant has given? The Internet is your main resource, but that's where other problems start.

Anybody with reasonable knowledge on, say, a health-related topic, is surprised at the carefully crafted nonsense, often expressed with subtle distortion, often supported with irrelevant or weak references and often presented with an air of triumph, which individuals and organisations self-publish on the Internet. Truly junk, and not science.

Universities have professors of "Public Understanding of Science", but there is a problem of "Public Misunderstanding". It is difficult to change ideas, however mistaken, which have been welcomed into a receptive mind, and have taken hold there, resonating closely with what the mind *wishes* to believe. Health is particularly open to such deception, from bottled water which has been subjected to soothing music in order to give it beneficial "vibrational energies"¹ to other modern "snake oils".

For noise, many deceptions relate to infrasound and to wind turbines, sometimes combined. A Google search for Infrasonic Weapon brings up nearly 20,000 results, including solution of the mystery of the crewless ship Marie Celeste, which is said to have lost its crew because of 7Hz infrasound, generated by certain conditions of ocean waves, causing the crew to go mad and throw themselves overboard.² In fairness to the owner of the web page, it is possible that this extreme explanation is due to a gradual transition from suggestions which started out as marginally plausible - if you did not analyse them too carefully - but after many repeats, each with its small change, have become truly ludicrous, unless it is something you wish to believe.

Infrasound from wind turbines has also been falsely associated with alarming consequences. Here the proponents take a very one dimensional view of noise, considering only frequencies and ignoring levels. But there is an important point to be made. What can we do about those who, in order to attract others to their cause, propagate scary misinformation about noise, leading to unnecessary anxiety and stress?

In the UK, the Advertising Standards Authority makes judgements on complaints of misleading information and its services have been used several times for statements on infrasound and low frequency noise. It even-handedly found against the objector to a wind turbine development in one case³ and against a developer in another case⁴.

We must be prepared to speak out against junk acoustics from wherever it comes, and if something is unfounded, however imaginatively expressed, we must expose it before it takes root in those receptive, but acoustically naive, minds at which it is aimed.

BRITISH COLUMBIA LAKES

Cigarette boats have become popular on lakes in British Columbia, to the extent that complaints are arising, particularly in respect of the noise they make. The Federal Government has jurisdiction over all Canadian bodies of water, and lack of regulation seems to be an issue. There are no speed limits on lakes and the fines for careless use of a boat, creating a noise nuisance, are trivial. Existing regulations do require that the boats engines have a muffler, and that the boats must exhaust into the water, rather than air. However the boats commonly have a muffler by pass switch which gives its operator the option of exhausting into water or air. Operators generally opt for air, as that gives an enhanced performance. It also generates a lot of noise. Presently a range of options to control the problem is being considered, including seriously increasing the fines, and allowing for the impounding of offenders boats.

WIND TURBINES NOT NOISY

Ontario's noise guidelines for wind turbines are sound and although more research is needed, there is no scientific proof that the machines cause excessive noise, says a consultant's report for Ontario's Ministry of the Environment. The report by Ryerson Professor Ramani Ramakrishnan, an acoustics expert, was completed in December 2007, but has just been posted on the government's Environmental Registry. It is part of the province's ongoing review of its current regulations for wind farm noise levels. As part of that review, the ministry hired Ramakrishnan to look at wind turbine noise guidelines and policies in other areas, as well as to critique available scientific literature, including a dissertation by Dutch scientist G. P. van den Berg. The Dutch study found that 98-metre tall turbines at a German wind farm near the Dutch border made more noise at night than expected. The report has been used as supporting evidence for those opposing wind farm projects near their homes. But Ramakrishnan's critiques of this data says that van den Berg's claims were not backed by scientific evidence. "The dissertation was to provide scientific evidence for increased annoyance from wind farm noise during evening and nighttime hours. The review showed the above was not the case," stated the Ontario report. The noise expert's report for the ministry found that the provincial regulations surrounding wind farm noise levels strike a fair balance "between noise impact and the need for wind farms, based on currently available scientific data." Ramakrishnan said that though those regulations are sound for most situations, van den Berg's dissertation raises questions and concerns that need to be addressed on the noise impacts of wind turbines.

GETTING ON WITH THE JOB

The number of noise abatement notices being served in York has risen more than sevenfold over the last three years, City of York Council has said. The authority said that during the period 2007/08, 89 noise abatement notices were issued, compared with 76 in 2006/07 and 12 in 2005/06.

LOUD MUSIC = GOOD TRADE

The Fiji Retailers Association does not agree that loud music played in shops and supermarkets in the capital city pose a problem for people. Association president Himmat Lodhia said complaints by people that loud music played in shops and supermarkets in the capital city was noise pollution were not entirely true. Mr Lodhia said loud music was played in almost all the shops and supermarkets to attract customers, and it had been proven to work.

STANSTED

Leading figures in Britain's horse racing industry are threatening to move their animals overseas because of plans for more than 400 aircraft a day to circle over their stud farms. National Air Traffic Services (Nats) is proposing to create a new holding stack near Newmarket, Suffolk, for aircraft queueing to land at Stansted. The stack is one of two being created to cope with a large expansion of the Essex airport. Stansted handles about 190,000 flights a year at present. BM, the Spanish-owned company that runs the airport, wants to increase that number initially to 260,000 on the existing runway and then to open a second runway in 2015, raising total capacity to more than half a million flights a year. Newmarket, at present one of the most tranquil areas in East Anglia, has the largest concentration of stud farms in Europe. The Derby winners of 2006 and 2007, Sir Percy and Authorised, both retired to stud there, and this year's winner, New Approach, is also likely to end up in the area. More than 7,000 thoroughbreds are cared for by 2,000 people on stud farms in a few dozen square miles underneath the proposed stack. A study commissioned by the Newmarket Horse Racing and Breeders Group suggested that almost two thirds of the stud farms would either move or curtail investment in the area because of the noise and air pollution created by the stack.

YOUNG AUSTRALIANS' HEARING

An Australian government report said young people risk developing permanent hearing problems if they go to noisy bars and listen to loud music through headphones. The report just released, found two out of three Australians suffered some degree of hearing damage, but 70 percent of people aged 18 to 34 years had reported ringing in their ears, or tinnitus, which can be a sign of permanent damage. "This may reflect a lifestyle aspect, with younger Australians more likely to attend bars, pubs and listen to music through headphones," said the report, titled "Is Australia Listening." The report said 41 percent of adults listen to music through headphones at least once a month, with 76 percent of young adults listen to music through headphones on MP3 players such as iPods. It also found 60 percent of younger people who listen to music through headphones turn the volume up high enough to damage their ears. The report urged people to listen to MP3 players at a moderate level to protect their ears from long-term harm. Professor Harvey Dillon, from the government-funded Hearing Australia, said many young people did not realise that hearing damage was permanent. "If it is loud, it can cause damage. and if it does cause you damage, it is permanent," he said.

LOUISIANA LEGISLATION

Excessive, pointless, headache-inducing noise from stereos in vehicles and homes has been a hot topic in Louisiana. "A lot of people have been disturbed by it," State representative Sam Little said of the boom-box trend. "Even in rural areas, it has become a problem." Little is the primary author, together with State Representative Barbara Norton and State Senator Mike Walsworth, of House Bill No. 1123, introduced to the legislature in April. Having passed the House and Senate, the bill has just been signed into law as Act No. 94 by Governor Bobby Jindal. The law amends state revised statute 14:103(C) relative to "emanation of excessive sound or noise," increasing the fine for the first offense from \$100 to \$200, and from \$200 to \$300 for the second or subsequent offenses.

Indian Government

The CNN-IBN Outlook State of the Environment Poll asked citizens of six cities across India how they felt for the environment and environment-related issues. When CNN-IBN conducted the survey, it was assumed civic issues like water and garbage would be uppermost on people's minds. However, 34 per cent think air pollution is the biggest environment problem that most people face, followed by green cover, water pollution, noise pollution and finally garbage disposal. Asked if they thought things would improve, seventy-seven per cent of respondents said air pollution would increase in the next five years, and seventy per cent said noise pollution would rise.

VIRGINIA DOGS

The Albemarle (VA) County Board of Supervisors is considering a new ordinance that is aimed at the dogs that make a lot of noise. Supervisor Dennis Rooker says "Over the years that I've been on the board I have had as many calls or more calls about barking dog problems as any other single thing." Board Chair Ken Boyd says, "Particularly, it's very annoying for someone who can't get any sleep at night and we've actually heard of people that have sold their houses because of this because there is no recourse for them." If they make the ordinance change, then it would create a penalty for owners of dogs that bark continuously for 30 minutes or more, and it could make it a misdemeanour offense.

FREDERICKSBURG FUNDAMENTALS

Fredericksburg City Council is coming up against the nature of noise, as it seeks to make the city quieter. An ordinance has been brought in, limiting permissible noise to 85 decibels during the day, 70 db in the evening, 60 db at night. But critics have pointed out that these limits are irrelevant – daytime noise measurements are around 75 db so what is the purpose of the 85 db limit? More importantly, the real nuisance lies in booming bass tones which are low in decibel terms. How will a high decibel-based ordinance limit throbbing low frequency sound?

