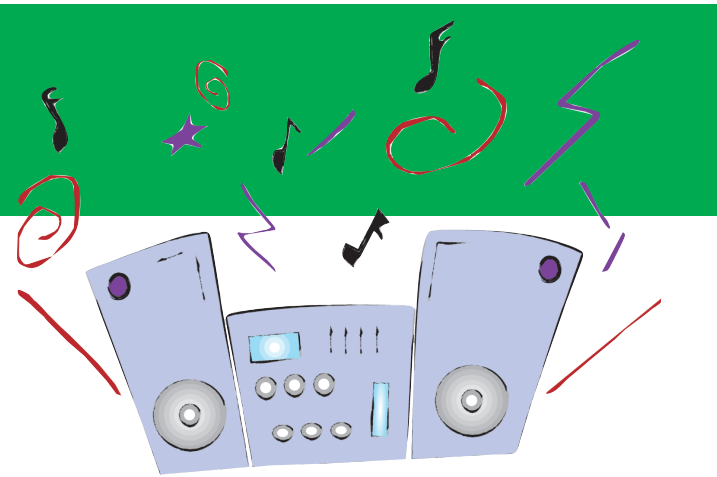


Noise



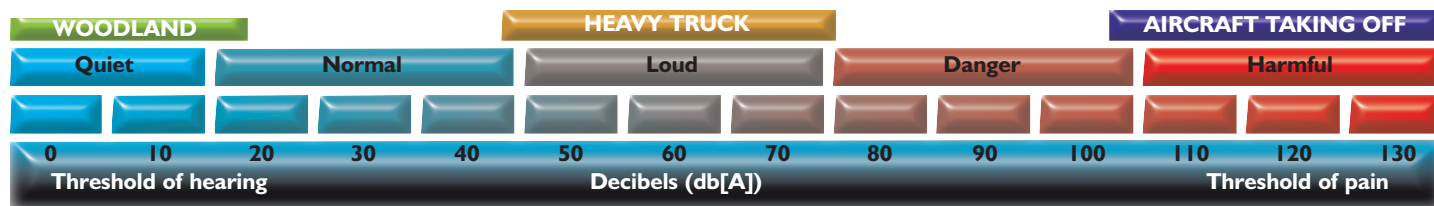
Sound is a sensation caused by pressure variations in the air, caused by some source of vibration. In humans these pressure variations are received by the ear and interpreted by the brain - unwanted sound is called noise and evidence shows that complaints to local councils about it have increased dramatically over the last ten years.

Sound may be electronically measured, with results generally quoted in decibels (dB). An idea of typical noise levels encountered out of doors is shown on a noise scale, below:

It is difficult to measure how the occurrence of noise in the environment affects an individual's quality of life. Noise has been included in the 1992, 1993, 1997 and 2000 reports, with the following indicator only being set last year.

INDICATOR NOI - Noise Complaints Received per 1000 Population

The way noise complaints are measured and recorded is different throughout the county, so it is not possible to gain a meaningful picture over time of whether noise has become more or less of a problem in Hertfordshire. In England and Wales, there are more than double the number of domestic and transport related noise complaints than there were ten years ago.



It is a fact of life that we all make noise to some degree, whether it is at home, the workplace or when we travel. However, if noise becomes excessive, it can seriously reduce the quality of life or even result in physical harm. The responsibility for the statutory control of noise is by no means straightforward, with legal duties spread between a number of agencies.

In 1999/2000 local councils received over 156,860 complaints about domestic noise. There is a package of measures which local authorities, both in their strategic role as crime and disorder partners, and their role as landlords, can use to tackle neighbour nuisance problems. All landlords, whether social or private, have powers to take action against tenants who are breaching their tenancy agreement. The Noise Act 1996 covers noise emitted from dwellings at night. The maximum fine for breaching a Noise Abatement Notice in a domestic situation is £5,000, ten years ago it was £2,000.

In the vast majority of cases, the local authority is responsible for the control of excessive noise from commercial sources, although the Environment Agency may assume responsibility for large industrial processes such as oil refineries or chemical works. Whilst legislation may provide a legal remedy for existing noisy businesses, local authorities can seek to control future problems before they happen by exercising their power as a regulator under the Town & Country Planning legislation.

Noise caused by construction activity (including demolition and site clearance) whilst only temporary, can be limited by local authorities in terms of the times when noisy activity can take place or by setting noise limits and requiring the use of certain equipment.

Noise from roads, railways and air travel is regulated at a strategic level by Secretary of State, although local authorities can seek to limit the adverse effect of certain sources of noise through the planning system. Local authorities have powers to investigate complaints about certain sources of noise, but for transport there are no statutory limits. There are powers under the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993 to abate noise nuisance in the street such as car music systems, loudspeakers or loudhailers.

Aircraft noise is experienced across most of Hertfordshire. It is caused by aircraft landing at and departing from the two major civil airports, Stansted and Luton, on the edges of the county, overflying aircraft from other airports, general aviation and helicopters. The airports themselves are responsible for monitoring aircraft noise and enforcing those limits which do exist. Neither local authorities nor the public can easily take legal action over this form of noise. In the future, technological improvements should mean individual aircraft are less noisy than many of those flying today but the number of flights is likely to increase as the aviation industry grows.

The airports record and investigate complaints about aircraft noise and aircraft observed flying low or off-track. Interrogating complaints data is however difficult as numbers of complaints and the location of complainants can be influenced by a large number of factors.

In 2000, London Luton Airport recorded 1,512 complaints from 747 complainants* regarding 2,263 separate events. Stansted Airport recorded 3,548 complaints from 2,831 complainants regarding 4,934 events. In 2001, despite an increase in aircraft movements, Stansted recorded slightly fewer complaints (3,520) and events (4,498) from fewer (2,358) complainants. Hertfordshire residents made complaints about 1,706 events.

Noise levels that are so high that they may result in temporary or permanent hearing damage, are most typically encountered in the workplace. The responsibility to control occupational noise primarily rests with the employer, but the Health & Safety Executive (for mainly industrial businesses) and local authorities (for mainly offices, shops and small businesses) have powers to require employers to act to reduce excessive noise levels.

The noise emitted from individual vehicles is likely to decrease in the future as technology improves, but increasing volumes of traffic may mask this improvement. The number of noise complaints is continuing to rise but this may be due to the increased willingness of people to make an official complaint, rather than an increase in the occurrence of noise incidents.

* Complainants are individuals who have registered a complaint.

The figures recorded may double count the actual number of separate individuals complaining in any year. The events total excludes certain complaints regarding large numbers of events which the airports cannot investigate.

Further information sources:

Contact: Andy Godman, North Hertfordshire District Council.

Tel: 01462 474000 or your local council's Environmental Health Department.

www.nasca.org.uk/noise