

sleep due to noise causes people to have slow reaction times and poor judgment, which can result in mistakes at work or school and accidents on the job or on the road. Scientists have found that continuous, irritating noise can raise blood pressure, which leads to other health problems.

A major debate involves noise made by aircraft. Airport traffic in the United States nearly doubled from 1980 to 1990 and continues to grow at a rapid pace. People who live near airports once found aircraft noise an occasional annoyance, but because of increased traffic and runways added to accommodate growth, they now suffer sleep disruptions and other health effects.

Many people have organized groups to oppose airport expansion. Their primary concerns are the increase in noise and the decrease in property values associated with airport expansion.

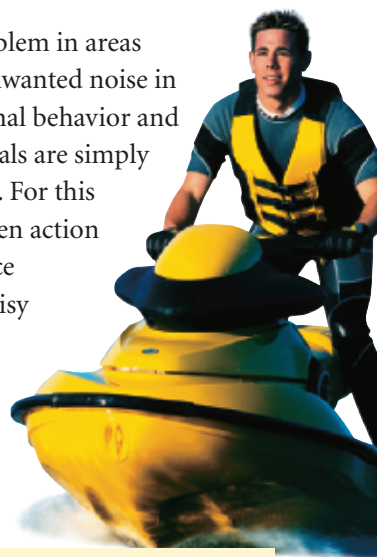
But, city governments argue that an airport benefits the entire community both socially and economically and that airports must expand to meet the needs of increased populations. Officials have also argued that people knew they were taking chances by building or buying near an airport and that the community cannot compensate for their losses. Airlines contend that attempts to reduce noise by using less power during takeoffs or by veering away from populated areas can pose a serious threat to passenger safety.

Other Annoyances

Besides airports, people currently complain most about noise pollution from nearby construction sites, personal watercraft, loud stereos in homes and cars, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, and power lawn equipment, such as mowers and leaf blowers. Many people want to control such noise by passing laws to limit the use of this equipment to certain times of the day or by requiring that sound-muffling devices be used.

Opponents to these measures argue that much of this activity takes place on private property and that, in the case of building sites and industries, noise limitation would increase costs. Some public officials would like to control annoying noise but point out that laws to do so fall under the category of nuisance laws, which are notoriously difficult to enforce.

Noise pollution is also a problem in areas where few or no people live. Unwanted noise in wilderness areas can affect animal behavior and reproduction. Sometimes animals are simply scared away from their habitats. For this reason, the government has taken action in some national parks to reduce sightseeing flights, get rid of noisy campers, and limit or eliminate certain noisy vehicles. Some parks have drastically limited the number of people who can be in a park at any one time.



Researching the Issue

1. Obtain a sound-level meter, and measure the noise level at places where you and your friends might be during an average week. Also make some measurements at locations where sound is annoyingly loud. Be sure to hold the meter at head level and read the meter for 30 seconds to obtain an average. Present your findings to the class in a graphic display.

2. Measure the sound levels at increasing distances from two sources of steady, loud noise. Record all of your locations and measurements. Graph your data, and write an interpretation describing how sound level varies with distance from the source.

3. Is there a source of noise in your community that most people recognize to be a problem? If so, find out what causes the noise and what people want to do to relieve the problem. Hold a panel discussion to analyze the opinions of each side, and propose your own solution.