

Noise Pollution

Noise pollution is a type of energy pollution in which distracting, irritating, or damaging sounds are freely audible. As with other forms of energy pollution (such as heat and light pollution), noise pollution contaminants are not physical particles, but rather waves that interfere with naturally-occurring waves of a similar type in the same environment. Thus, the definition of noise pollution is open to debate, and there is no clear border as to which sounds may constitute noise pollution. In the narrowest sense, sounds are considered noise pollution if they adversely affect wildlife, human activity, or are capable of damaging physical structures on a regular, repeating basis. In the broadest sense of the term, a sound may be considered noise pollution if it disturbs any natural process or causes human harm, even if the sound does not occur on a regular basis.¹

The World Health Organization has documented seven types of health hazards produced by noise.

1. **Hearing Impairment:** Noise damages hearing. Damaged hearing has life-long effects on school and job performance, on earning power, and on relationships.
2. **Interference with Spoken Communication:** Noise interferes with one's ability to understand what other people are saying. This may lead to a number of personal disabilities, handicaps, and behavioral changes.
3. **Sleep Disturbances:** Noise interrupts sleep. Sleep is necessary for good health. Disturbed sleep produces fatigue, causes irritability, impairs performance, and leads to accidents.
4. **Cardiovascular Disturbances:** Noise increases blood pressure and heart rate, and may cause abnormal heart rhythms. Noise produces these changes occur even when a person is asleep. (It is now known as a cause of fatal heart attacks.)
5. **Disturbances in Mental Health:** Noise may cause or contribute to anxiety, stress, nervousness, nausea, headache, emotional instability, argumentativeness, and mood changes.
6. **Impaired Task Performance:** Noise impairs performance, increases errors, and decreases motivation. Noise has a negative effect on learning, reading attention, problem solving, and memory.
7. **Negative Social Behavior and Annoyance Reactions:** Noise produces a wide range of unwanted emotional responses that interfere with work and school performance, and with the ability to get along with others. Some of these responses include anger, withdrawal, depression, anxiety, distraction, agitation, or exhaustion.²

Next Month: How to protect against Noise Pollution

¹ What is What.com; What is Noise Pollution. http://what-is-what.com/what_is/noise_pollution.html

² Goines, RN, Lisa and Hagle MD, Louis. "Noise Pollution: A Modern Plague." <http://www.noisefree.org/harms-adverse.php>