

MEDIA RELEASE

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IS NOISE DRIVING YOU MAD?

NOISE AWARENESS DAY : 29TH APRIL 2009

Boy racers could be driving you mad... literally. A recent survey shows boy racers' exhaust sound as the number one annoying noise in New Zealand, followed closely by dogs barking and car or house alarms going off.

There is a lot of excessive everyday noise that can affect not only your hearing but your physical and mental health. Persistent noise has been linked with increased stress levels, headaches, aggressive behaviour, loss of sleep and in some cases even heart disease and high blood pressure.

In the lead up to New Zealand's inaugural Noise Awareness Day, the National Foundation for the Deaf (NFD) commissioned a survey to find out what noises Kiwis find really annoying and could, potential, be making them ill. (Top 12 annoying noises follows this release).

Marianne Schumacher, executive manager of the NFD said community noise was growing as populations increase and it has got to the stage where governmental controls should be put in place to protect citizens.

"Long term exposure to noise can adversely affect health and it seems quite clear that noise pollution is increasingly eroding our quality of life. Legislators at all levels should protect us from noise pollution the same way they protected us from tobacco smoke and other forms of pollution.

"Through Noise Awareness Day, we want people to stop and think about what they are doing, how loud it is and do they really need to do it. Turning down the stereo could make the difference to your neighbour's sanity," said Ms Schumacher.

Daniel Shepherd who has a PhD in psychophysics and lectures at the Auckland University of Technology's Department of Psychology has studied the non-auditory effects of noise.

"Not everything we hear, unfortunately, is classified as wanted sound and one man's noise is another's music. Neighbourhood parties, barking dogs, road works or low flying aeroplanes can be huge irritants but, in isolation, do not constitute a health risk. However, research undertaken by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the last decade has indicated that chronic exposure to noise can have a serious impact on your health.

"Different individuals respond differently to noise. We all know people who can remain asleep even if a large bomb was detonated outside their bedroom door, while others awaken as the sound of a pin dropping. The WHO's research showed that it is the response of the listener to noise and not noise level per se that predicts health outcomes," said Dr Shepherd.

Noise, even at levels that are not harmful to hearing, is perceived subconsciously as a danger signal, even during sleep. The body reacts to noise with a “fight or flight” response with resultant nervous, hormonal and vascular changes that have far reaching consequences. Long term, the symptoms of stress and depression will result and a suppression of the immune system can lead to disease.

The WHO research noted that noise pollution may cause or contribute to the following adverse effects : anxiety, stress, nervousness, nausea, headaches, emotional instability, argumentativeness, sexual impotence, changes in mood, increase in social conflicts, neurosis, hysteria and psychosis.

Children, the elderly and those with underlying depression may be particularly vulnerable to these effects because they may lack adequate coping mechanisms.

In New Zealand ‘annoying’ noise is on the increase. Noise Control officers around the country report continual rises in the number of noise complaints. In Auckland City last year there were 20,768 complaints, a 14% increase on the previous year. Christchurch, the second largest city reported around 11,000 complaints, an increase of 10% on the previous year and the country’s third largest city, Manukau reported 10,509 complaints which was a 10% increase on last year. Wellington City received 5105 complaints, an increase of 6% on the previous year. All councils sited stereo/music noise as being the number one complaint.

“New Zealand’s environmental health experts are aware that noise pollution continues to grow and noise guidelines, standards and policies need to reviewed. However in this country, the non-auditory health effects of community noise have yet to be acknowledged in legislation,” concluded Ms Schumacher.

Ends

www.nfd.org

**The survey was conducted by Market Knowledge for the NFD in March 2009. It involved an online interview of 1000 New Zealanders aged 15+years. The sample was nationally representative.*

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MOST ANNOYING NOISE SURVEY

March 2009

TOP 12 MOST ANNOYING NOISES

1. Boy Racers' loud exhausts (69%)
2. Dog(s) barking (54%)
3. Car or house alarms going off (50%)
4. Snoring (49%)
5. Neighbour's loud music (44%)
6. Neighbour's DIY Noise – hammers, drills, leaf blowers (29%)
7. Neighbour's lawnmower (26%)
8. Other people's mobile phones ringing (17%)
9. Planes flying overhead (15%)
10. Rubbish truck collecting bins (15%)
11. Children/babies crying/screaming (5%)
12. Body noises – chewing, coughing, humming, whistling, grinding teeth (3%)

Note: Total sample size is 1000.

