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Noise Awareness Day: Stress levels in Germany too high

Federal Environment Agency in favour of turnaround in noise stress among population

There is virtually nobody residing in Germany who is not affected by noise. Calculations by the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) show that 13 million people in Germany are exposed to sound levels that are the clear cause of health risks and increasing sleep disorders. On the occasion of International Noise Awareness Day on 25 April 2007, UBA President Prof. Dr. Andreas Troge commented, "It is high time for a turnaround in noise annoyance among the population. Noise is not only a nuisance, it can make one ill." The EC Directive on Environmental Noise and its provisions to get information to, and participation by, the public are crucial to the better protection of human health against noise. "We must do more against noise annoyance of our population. There is still too much quiet about noise", said President Andreas Troge.

Studies carried out for UBA demonstrate that traffic noise is the cause of more sleeping disorders and increases the risk of suffering a disorder of the cardiovascular system: One UBA study of the literature corroborates the correlation between road traffic noise and heart attacks: the risk of suffering a heart attack increases in men by some 30 percent when they reside in areas with traffic noise at daytime ambient noise levels over 65 decibels (dB(A)). There is a direct correlation between aircraft noise and increased use of pharmaceutical drugs. This is the result of an epidemiological study done on behalf of UBA which analysed data from more than 800,000 people living in the region around a German airport with night-time flight activity. Results showed that aircraft noise is a factor causing those exposed to it to make more frequent visits to physicians, who in turn are prescribing more and more drugs. These scientific findings are also reflected in surveys on perceived noise annoyance in the residential environment: respondents most frequently rate road traffic noise as the greatest annoyance, ahead of other factors such as car exhaust fumes and factory sewage. UBA's ongoing online noise survey also shows this relevance: 60 percent of participants feels considerably disturbed by road traffic noise.

Despite the known negative impact of transport, there has as yet been no turnaround: noise levels remain at high levels. One reason for this may be that the EU, federal, *Laender*, and local authorities have not taken the effects of noise sufficiently into account when making planning decisions, especially as concerns transport and urban construction development. This issue will be brought to bear with greater significance with the EC Environmental Noise Directive. In a first step, the Directive calls for an assessment of the noise annoyance experienced in agglomerations and along major roads by 30 June 2007. With citizen participation, national action plans to reduce noise must be drawn up by 18 July 2008. This obligatory inclusion of the public might lead to a broad political debate about the effects of noise, and measures which have thus far only seldom been implemented, e.g. low-noise road surfacing, might be stepped up.

As concerns noise action planning, the UBA is campaigning for protection of the public and high-standard environmental quality objectives. Maintaining noise levels below 65 dB(A) as a 24-hour value, and 55 dB(A) at night can only be a first step in the prevention of serious health risks and sleep disturbances. The UBA has advised a reduction of noise annoyance in the medium term to 60 dB(A) as a 24-hour value, and 50 dB(A) during the nighttime.

An UBA leaflet on noise, *Lärm - das unterschätzte Risiko [Noise: the underestimated risk]* can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de>. E-mail orders to: uba@broschuerenversand.de; direct written orders to Federal Environment Agency, c/o GVP Gemeinnützige Werkstätten Bonn, P.O. Box 30 03 61, 53183 Bonn.

The *Transportation Noise and Cardiovascular Risk* study (in English) is located at <http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/2997.pdf>.

A study titled *Beeinträchtigung durch Fluglärm: Arzneimittelverbrauch als Indikator für gesundheitliche Beeinträchtigung [Aircraft noise disturbance: Drug use as indicator of health impairment]* is available at <http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3153.pdf>.

Further information on the European Environmental Noise Directive can be found at: <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/laermprobleme/>

Other press releases on noise:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-presse/2007/pdf/pd07-008.pdf>

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-presse/2006/pdf/pd06-047.pdf>

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-presse/2006/pdf/pd06-025.pdf>

<http://www.umweltdaten.de/uba-info-presse/pi04/pd04-019.pdf>

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