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## Noise vs. Quiet

*In an ever-assaultive sonic environment, do we have a choice?*

By Kat Avila | Web Published 4.27.2002



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"Please take at least 60 seconds...on this day to be quiet and listen to the sounds around you." - from an e-mail alert about International Noise Awareness Day

As I write this article, on the other side of my bedroom/home office wall, my neighbor is building a single-passenger aircraft in his garage. His garage door is open, his aircraft blocks access to neighboring garages, and the sounds of his power tools echo out into the amphitheater created by the U-shape of the condominium complex where I live. I have done everything I can to stop the noise, and I am drained by the daily evening and weekend assault of noise against my sanctuary and by the effort it takes to reduce and/or eliminate the noise. I have to ask myself: "Noise vs. quiet." Is it possible to have a choice any longer when I am in the middle of an ocean filled with cellular telephones, leaf blowers, boom cars, and dogs that bark all night?

Noise puts your system on alert. Long-term noise adds to the unprecedented amount of stress placed on the contemporary human body. Picture your neighbor drawing his fingernail across a chalkboard every day saying, "I can't understand why this bothers you." Eventually it might cross your mind that you might want to shoot him, which is what happened a few weeks ago in a nearby city over a noise complaint.

No noise complaint should have to end in violence or a lawsuit, though it's difficult to think otherwise when you're in the middle of a loud confrontation with your neighbor about what you think of his noise. To date, I



have filed a written complaint with the property management company, spoken with Police Services about noise ordinances (these can be looked up online) and when to call the police -- call anytime it's "loud and unreasonable." See California Penal Code, Section 415[2] -- and walked door-to-door in my neighborhood distributing self-made informational flyers about International Noise Awareness Day (April 24) to get my community involved.

As I walked around my neighborhood, I thought of the tradition of community activism I was participating in. My rubbing elbows with arts activists in Chicano theatre and with community activists in MANA (a National Latina Organization) had left an indelible impression on me after all. I followed the model they gifted me with and have tried to emulate their patience and self-control.

Noise is not an individual problem. It's a growing community problem that contributes to the development of hearing loss, stress-related disorders, and aggression. "The idea that people get used to noise is a myth," reports a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report, *Noise: A Health Problem* (1978). "Even when we think we have become accustomed to noise, biological changes still take place inside us, preparing us for physical activity if necessary."

The natural healing power of peace and quiet should not become a luxury affordable only to the few who can isolate themselves from the masses. I wonder aloud how much longer we can hang on to noise-free zones in a society where many individuals act as though they are terrified of silence, partly a result of Western conditioning that silence is negative and carries no meaning.

Is there still a choice?

That's something only the community can answer.

Editor's note: for more on noise, go to <http://www.nonoise.org>

*Author Kat Avila's web site at <http://www.geocities.com/buscandocalifornia>*

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