

From the Ministries

MALTA'S NOISE ACTION PLAN

A Noise Action Plan, which seeks to identify measures aimed at avoiding, preventing or reducing where necessary, the harmful exposure and effects of environmental noise on human health, resulting from major road traffic, has been published by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority for public consultation.

The draft Action Plan, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Environment Noise Directive covering a five year period, also provides an overview of the requirements and obligations of the Environment Noise Regulations and presents a summary of the results of the strategic noise mapping within Malta.

The adopted approach in this action plan is to manage and reduce environmental noise emissions and its impact at source through operating procedures and restrictions. The Directive does not cover noise pollution at the workplace, entertainment venues or construction sites. Neither does it regulate neighbourhood, firework or consumer product noise, noise nuisance

and noise transmission between dwellings.

This plan was drafted on the recommendations given to the Authority by a team of noise experts that were engaged to assist in the implementation of the Environment Noise Directive, to prepare the required noise maps and to draft technical specifications for the supply of noise monitoring equipment.

Although the current noise project which was funded by MEPA's own funds, the noise monitoring project, including the monitoring equipment and noise mapping software forms part of a larger initiative which aims to enhance Malta's environmental monitoring infrastructure and capacity in the areas of noise, water, air, radiation and soil. This larger project, worth over €4.9 million is co-funded by the EU's European Regional Development fund and the Maltese government under Malta's Operational Programme I, 'Investing in Competitiveness for a Better Quality of life.' The project started last year and is expected to be completed before July 2013.

ROAD HAULAGE: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT INTRODUCES "POLLUTER PAYS" PRINCIPLE

Revising "Eurovignette" road haulage tax rules will make it possible for Member States to charge hauliers for air and noise pollution costs, in addition to motorway tolls. A directive approved by the European Parliament will ensure that revenue from these charges is used to improve the performance of transport systems and cut pollution.

In the recent debate, Said El Khadraoui (S&D, BE), who is steering the legislation through Parliament, said that the compromise reached marks a cornerstone for the next decade of

European transport policy as it "offers for the first time the possibility to Member States to charge external costs (...) and to make best use of a wide range of toll variations to improve mobility."

On average, 3 to 4 euro cents per vehicle/km may be added to charges for using transport infrastructure to cover the external costs of road haulage, starting with noise and air pollution. The directive will cover not only trans-European transport (TEN-T) networks, but all motorways, and will apply to vehicles of over 3.5 tonnes. If a Member State wishes to grant exemptions for vehicles of up to 12 tonnes, then it must notify the European Commission of the reasons why.

In exchange, Member States firmly commit themselves to invest 15% of overall revenue in TEN-T networks. The remaining amounts should be used to reduce damage to the environment and develop all transport systems

sustainably. To promote transparency and public debate, MEPs inserted in the law a requirement that Member States report regularly to the Commission on the charges imposed and the use made of revenue from them.

SCOTTSDALE FINALLY TO ENFORCE ITS NOISE LAWS

Scottsdale will begin enforcing its noise ordinance this month, seven months after city officials passed the regulations designed to crack down on overly loud bars and clubs. The city acknowledges it has received dozens of formal complaints about nightlife noise since

the ordinance was passed. City officials attributed the enforcement delay to a formal bidding process required to train officers and purchase noise meters that will assist them in their quest to regulate noisy nightspots in the city's downtown area, home to numerous restaurants and bars that attract tourists and patrons from throughout the Valley.

COUNCIL TO BE FINED?

Benalmadena Town Hall (Spain) could face a fine for not tackling noise from bars and discos in Puerto Marina, one of the Costa del Sol's busiest nightlife areas. Its attempts over recent weeks to stop the residents case of excessive noise from bars to be taken to court has failed. They reportedly hired the same lawyer that won a €2.8 million payout for 18 residents in similar case in Torre del Mar (Velez-Malaga). But residents complain of noise from premises with open doors, windows and outdoor speakers. They also complain of noise from venues that are not licensed or carry out activities for which they have no permit, as well as those who fail to respect opening hours or allow noise

above legal limits. The plaintiffs have provided noise level measurements carried out in apartments by technicians from the Junta de Andalucia Environmental Department which prove that at times, levels reach 68 dB inside their homes, above the 64.6 dB limit. In the past, the town hall has been lax about enforcing the laws, but with the threat of a lawsuit, the local Police closed down several premises over the past weeks. However, this has not prevented the case from reaching the courts. The town hall has now been required to send Contentious-Administrative Court number 2 in Malaga all the documents which prove what has been done to do away with the problem, including the closing orders.

RESIDENTS ASK COUNCIL TO USE ITS NOISE POWERS

A group of residents concerned about the reopening of a mine in Tweed, Ontario, is looking for its council to regulate noise and traffic from the site. Q-CLAIMS co-chairman Mike Acerra, who represented the group in a delegation to council, said while the municipality has no control or jurisdiction over water testing and

environmental assessments, it can govern traffic and noise. The Ministry of the Environment has indicated the municipality can "create, legislate and enforce" a noise restriction regime, he said. "In essence this pit is an industrial operation in a rural residential area," Acerra said. "Noise limits and hours of operation must be in place." He said a traffic study should also be undertaken on Queensborough Road as

recommended by the MOE. "Given that this is a school bus route and there have already been concerns about the location of the entry to the pit, serious consideration must be given to signage with warning lights and a dramatically reduced speed limit," Acerra said. "Any study will show the risk of slow-moving vehicles entering an 80 km zone and the dramatically greater stopping distance for heavily loaded trucks." Acerra said the MOE office also recommended residents adjacent to the pit take pictures

of their foundations given a threat from blasting vibration damage. He said this, in conjunction with concerns about possible threats to water is not only troubling, but represents a threat to property values. Acerra said Q-Claims met with council in January and there was a suggestion a liaison committee be established, but nothing has happened. "I'm disappointed three months have passed and there's been no substantial action on our behalf," Acerra said.

NOISE SQUAD MAKE SIXTH SEIZURE RAID OF THE YEAR

Noise enforcement officers from North Lincolnshire Council have made their sixth seizure raid of the year after a tenant breached an abatement order. This time, the target for the eight-strong squad of council and police officers was a terraced home in Rochester Close at Scunthorpe's Westcliff estate. The council officers clad in body armour took away an assortment of television sets and other electrical appliances. The seized items

will be kept for a minimum of six months before they are either smashed up and recycled or donated to youth organisations and the children's ward at Scunthorpe General Hospital. Stephen Coulman, the council's environmental health manager, said the abatement order was served on the tenant in Rochester Close last October. The seizure order was made after officers recently witnessed a breach of the order. Mr Coulman said currently there were more than 150 noise abatement orders in place and they lasted for a lifetime.

NOTICE TO OVER 100 PLACES OF WORSHIP OVER NOISE POLLUTION

Jammu and Kashmir government has issued notice to 104 places of worship and 72 banquet halls and hotels warning them to lower the level of noise pollution generated by them or else face action. "We have issued notices to the committees of places of worship and owners of banquet halls and hotels to regulate the level of noise as prescribed under Noise Pollution Rules on the direction of J and K High court," said District Development Commissioner (DDC), Jammu, Sanjeev Verma. "We

have asked to maintain permissible limits of noise as prescribed under the law as the high degree of noise pollution generated from loud speakers etc. causes inconvenience to the people," Verma said. In this regard notice was issued to 104 temples, mosques and other shrines besides 72 banquet halls and hotels in the city warning them to face action if they do not regulate the noise pollution. As per notification, silence zones will have noise levels of 50 db during the day and 40 db during the night, followed by 55 db during day and 45 db during night in residential areas, 65 db during day and 55 db during the night in commercial areas.

NEIGHBOURS, TVS, DOGS

Thousands of noise complaints are being lodged with councils in the Black Country and Staffordshire each year –

with neighbours the chief culprits. In the last three years there were 11,990 reports in Wolverhampton alone. The majority of the complaints were about

blaring music or televisions. Walsall residents have also made 9,690 complaints in the same period, with more than 6,000 relating to 'domestic' noise and a further 2,408 about animals making lives a misery. Figures in

Sandwell have remained steady at around 1,200 reports for each of the last three years, while reports in South Staffordshire, dominated by barking dogs, were about 500 a year.

NO LIMIT NOISE ORDINANCE

As the Town of Fillmore (IN) continues reworking its nuisance ordinance, the new document will not contain a decibel limit on noise, according to the town council president. President Wes Terhune said he could not find a number that would be fair to all the people of the town. While some

neighbors want a noise limit to curtail activity at a motorcycle track north of Hendricks Street, Terhune said there is no good way to do so. "Some people want the number so low you can't ride a motorcycle. If you do that, you can't mow your yard, you can't cut a tree," Terhune said. "I don't see the sense in putting in a noise limit at this time."

WAKEFIELD, THE TRUTH: ITS GRIM

Noisy neighbours are driving people out of their own homes and leaving others stressed and exhausted. All-night parties, barking dogs and alarms are just some of the menaces being reported to Wakefield Council up to ten times a day. In one bizarre case the council's noise abatement team dealt with tenants who were forced to move out of a home because their neighbours were deliberately playing loud recordings of train sounds through the wall 24 hours a day. Gary Blenkinsop, the council's environmental health manager, said some offenders seemed unaware of the distress they were causing but others acted maliciously. He said: "With the case of the train noise it's hard to understand what is going through their minds." The night-time noise team, which responds to noise complaints every weekend between 8pm and 2am, dealt with more than 1,800 calls last year.

CHENNAI: LIKE LIVING IN A FACTORY

Living in Chennai is equivalent to living in a factory — at least in terms of how much noise all the residents are subjected to. Data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) shows that the noise levels everywhere in Chennai are over 100 dB — more than a typical factory. The average noise level in Chennai is actually higher at more than 129 decibels. The permissible limit is 85 dB fixed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). It's not just Chennai. CPCB data shows that noise levels in all the major Indian metros are far above permissible limits and may have reached dangerous levels. Real time data from 25 noise pollution monitors in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad shows that major city spots, which are being monitored, have registered maximum noise levels.