

## **Environmental noise in Europe and initiatives of the European Commission.**

Environmental noise pollution relates to noise caused by road, rail and airport traffic, as well as large industrial installations. Prolonged exposure to high levels of noise pollution can lead to serious health effects mediated by the human endocrine system and by the brain, such as cardiovascular diseases, sleep disturbance and annoyance (a feeling of discomfort affecting general well-being). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), among the environmental pressures in Europe, noise pollution leads to a disease burden that is second in magnitude only to that from air pollution, specifically to that of particulate matter. **A videoclip - in [DE](#), [EN](#), [ES](#), [FR](#), [IT](#), [PL](#) - informs you on the current situation of environmental noise in the EU.** In the EU, the Environmental Noise Directive (2002/49/EC) is the main instrument to streamline local, national and EU interventions to manage and reduce noise exposure. After 15 years in place, the Directive was assessed against its relevance, coherency, effectiveness, efficiency and EU added value. The Directive remains highly relevant for EU policy-making as noise pollution still constitutes a major environmental health problem in Europe. A common approach to the noise management and harmonised data provide a high-quality evidence base for understanding the issue and further developing EU noise-at-source legislation. The Directive is coherent in itself and with other relevant EU legislation (environmental and noise-at-source legislation). Regarding effectiveness, some progress has been made towards a common approach throughout the EU, but effects materialised only partially due to the delays in adopting common assessment methodologies. Noise population exposure data was so far not used for legislation on noise at source. The Directive is however increasingly drawing attention to the significance of the harmful effects of noise on health. The administrative costs are low (€0.15 for noise maps and €0.03 for action plans per citizen, every 5 years). Cost-benefit analysis showed that where action plans - including measures for noise management - have been implemented, the Directive was efficient with a favourable cost-benefit ratio of 1:29. The Directive can generate EU added value by providing a level playing field across the EU in which transport infrastructure operators can compete, and by better informing EU policy-making. As a result of delays in implementation, the Directive has not yet delivered all its potential EU added value.

To spread this information and to improve awareness on the subject, the European Commission organised a **conference on "[Noise in Europe](#)"** to raise awareness on the negative impacts of noise from transport on human health. At the Conference, the WHO representative confirmed that noise remains a serious threat to human health, causing cardiovascular diseases, including ischaemic heart disease, stroke and diabetes, sleep disturbance, annoyance (stress) and cognitive impairment of children. The WHO is in the final stage of the revision of its guidelines and recommendations on maximum noise levels to protect against all serious adverse health effects. The recent exposure data from the European Environment Agency (EEA) demonstrate that more than 100 million European citizens are affected by high noise levels negatively impacting human health.

After the conference, the **involvement of stakeholders** will be key when further reflecting on several aspects of the EU noise policy identified during the evaluation and the conference, such as:

1. to possibly increase the ambition of the Directive and/or of the associated legislation addressing noise at source, including the possible introduction of concrete targets at EU level through binding science-based limit/target values;
2. to broaden the scope of the Directive beyond transport and industry sources;
3. to lower the thresholds for noise mapping, currently excluding significant sources of noise (i.e. below 55 Lden and 50 Lnight) and;
4. to further clarify some definitions (such as "Quiet Areas", "Agglomerations", "Harmful effects").

Public funding for noise reduction measures - covering the full life cycle costs - was considered to be important. Also, costs have to be internalised, respecting the polluter pays principle and thus ensuring a level playing field. Clear public procurement rules are crucial.

Increased stringency of EU at source standards needs to be balanced against other effective measures such as road surface improvements and urban planning measures. Interconnections between noise and urban planning actions should be enhanced.

End-of-pipe measures such as operating restrictions (mainly during the night) should - according to transport sector representatives - be avoided, while at the same time citizens claim that sleep at night has to be respected.

To allow reflecting on the mentioned topics, the European Commission opens its formal Noise Expert Group beyond Member States, to include stakeholders from industry, infrastructure managers, representatives of civil society and representatives of groups of citizens whose health is affected by noise. The related **call for applications** -with deadline 13 October 2017- **is available [here](#)**.

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