**JAEI Enviro-corner**

**Noise!**

Noise is a natural consequence of whatever we do. It forms part of our everyday lives and, we often just tolerate it. However, noise has the capacity to cause conflict between those who are generating it and those who are victims of it.

Noise pollution can be described as unwanted or offensive sounds that unreasonably intrude into people's daily activities. Under most circumstances, intolerable noise will not cause people to complain, but there are circumstances where the volume, extent, or recurrence will cause irritation and frustration.

Since environmental noise is persistent and inescapable, a significant proportion of the population is exposed to it. The public perceives it as one of the major environmental problems. It can affect people in both physiological and psychological ways, interfering with basic activities such as sleep, rest, study and communication. Even though these impacts on human health have long been known, recent research shows that they arise at lower noise levels than was previously thought.

Environmental noise - an unwanted or harmful outdoor sound - is spreading, both in its duration and geographical coverage. Noise is associated with many human activities, but it is road, rail and air traffic noise that has the highest impact.

The quantification of the related disease burden of environmental noise is an emerging challenge for policy makers. Noise exposure not only leads to sleep disturbance, annoyance and hearing impairment, but also to other health problems such as cardiovascular disorders. In addition, the impacts of noise are enhanced when they interact with other environmental stressors, such as air pollution and chemicals. This may be particularly the case in urban areas, where most of these stressors coexist. Noise pollution is also a cause of annoyance, which in turn, can lead to violence. The World Health Organisation is currently developing a study, addressing several health effects of noise and quantifying burden of disease from environmental noise.

Noise also impacts on wildlife. The extent of the long-term repercussions of this, for example changing migration routes and moving animals away from their preferred feeding and breeding grounds, need to be further investigated.

Marine scientists are concerned about excessive noise used by oil drills, submarines and other vessels on and in the ocean. Many marine animals, especially whales and dolphins, use hearing to find food, communicate, defend and survive in the ocean. Excessive noise and SONAR *(the use of sound by submarines and other fishing vessels to deterring the depth of water, the closeness of an object, or detect movement of other objects in the water)* causes injury and death to whales and dolphins. The effect of a navy submarine’s SONAR can be felt 300 miles away from the source. Many beached whales and dolphins have suffered physical trauma, including bleeding around the brain, ears and other tissues and large bubbles in their organs so there is no question that SONAR is a major problem within the marine environment.

## **Noise Pollution - What is legal and what isn't?**

The urban myth says you can make noise until 10pm on a week night and 12pm on a weekend but, in actual fact most municipalities have by-laws in place that focus on the number of decibels rendered rather than the actual time frame in which noise is made.

There are two different kinds of noise, namely, disturbing noise and noise nuisance. A disturbing noise is objective and is defined as a scientifically measurable noise level and generally compared to the existing ambient noise level. A noise nuisance is a subjective measure and is defined as any noise that disturbs or impairs or may disturb or impair the convenience or peace of any person.

Municipal by-laws govern disturbing noise. An example of this kind of noise would be loud party music. This kind of party noise is generally tolerated until 10pm on a Friday and/or Saturday evening before you can take steps against the perpetrator/s. SAPS will generally deal with these noise issues if there are complaints from neighbours and there are steps to follow if it becomes a nasty habit of a neighbour.

Noise nuisance is a totally different matter. This kind of noise makes you reach for the Panados and can include playing loud music or a musical instrument or operating a television set loudly, operating machinery or power tools that cause a noise nuisance, shouting and talking loudly, allowing an animal to become a noise nuisance, operating a vehicle that causes a noise nuisance and driving a vehicle on a public road in a manner that causes a noise nuisance. This noise is illegal at all times and is enforceable at any time of the day.

In terms of section 25 of the Act, the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism is empowered to make regulations regarding noise, and the powers of provincial and local authorities to control noise prevention, reduction or elimination. The National Noise Control Regulations give local authorities extensive powers to regulate noise. (To download The National Environment (Noise Standards and Control) Regulations – go to <http://www.kcca.go.ug/uploads/acts/Noise%20Standards%20and%20Control%20Regulations.pdf> )

# 21st Century

# But we do live in the 21st Century, so some noise is part and parcel of living. However, we can do something to enable sanity to prevail – we can take some time out in God’s Creation!

When we spend time in God’s Creation, there’s no societal influence. There are no trends, influences, or expectations, and you are free to “just be” – with God. Nature helps us to connect with his powerful, loving presence. You might feel this presence loving and supporting you. Nature brings you closer to our own spirit as well. Nature has a calming effect on us and we also free to explore how eco-systems works – the total interdependence of all living creatures. It teaches us how to live in harmony with Creation and with one another.

Nature is also a reminder that chaos is a part of life. Chaos is inevitable, and life is not always going to fall into place seamlessly. While the messy parts of life may not always be resolved positively, there is always a chance you'll find a rainbow at the end of the storm.

Urgency, deadlines and “clock time,” as measured by hours, minutes and seconds, melt away. Clocks teach us to abandon the natural rhythms of our bodies and the Earth and conform to a schedule rooted in our economic system. That creates a lot of stress. On the flip side, nature models a healthier pace of life. Trees and plants grow s – l – o – w – l – y. Buck graze calmly. Butterflies flit from flower to flower - this is their natural pace. Everyone is moving according to their natural rhythm, and you begin to do the same.

We are also reminded that we are not infinite – we experience the life cycles around us. Plants and animals live and die to make room for the next generation and we are no exception to that rule. When we spend time in nature, we are reminded that life is fleeting - and sometimes we need that perspective in order to remember what truly matters.

**As the noise of our crazy culture fades, your mind calms and you experience silence and stillness.** What a relief! So what are you waiting for? Go out and spend some time in the quiet – go out into God’s Creation!