

# LOUD NOISES!!!

*The world's so damn loud we can't even hear ourselves complain!*

## BACKGROUND

The 20th century was by far the loudest hundred years in human history. Since the Industrial Age took full swing in the late 1800s, life has become louder and louder. Very little has been done to curb noise pollution, despite overwhelming evidence that prolonged exposure to excessive auditory stimuli adversely affects learning abilities, concentration, and stress levels in humans and even in wildlife. Without any real support from state or federal governments, some local municipalities have come up with their own noise-violation procedures. Some examples:

## RECORD TIME

In *Uncle John's Endlessly Engrossing Bathroom Reader*, we reported about Paul Sacco, a Colorado judge who sentenced teen noise violators to a few hours of listening to Barry Manilow music. In 2009 Sacco expanded his catalog of music-as-punishment to include the *Barney* theme song and an hour-long marathon of the Styx song "Come Sail Away" as sung by *South Park's* Eric Cartman. The tactic may be catching on. When a Miami Beach driver was caught blasting 50 Cent in his Jaguar at 5:00 a.m., Judge Jeffrey Swartz sentenced him to two hours of the Verdi opera *La Traviata*. (Reportedly, it turned the offender into an opera fan.)

## TRAIN IN VAIN

There are very few problems dire enough to make citizens *volunteer* to pay a tax increase to get them fixed, but that's exactly what happened in a neighborhood of Vancouver, Washington. Residents got tired of the loud train whistles that blew every time a locomotive came through. "You can't even talk on the phone," said one local. So they asked the city government to erect barriers to keep cars off the tracks when the trains are coming—thereby eliminating the need for the whistles. Officials said no; they didn't have the \$1 million it would cost. "Fine," said the residents, "Then *we'll* pay for it. Raise our property taxes. That whistle is driving us crazy."

### GOING CUCKOO

The residents of a Phoenix, Arizona, neighborhood complained to city officials about the bells of Cathedral of Christ the King Church. They chimed on the hour, every hour, every day, every week. "It makes us feel like captives in our own homes," said one citizen. Officials finally put an end to the siege: They took the church's bishop, Rick Painter, to court, where he was sentenced to probation. From now on, if the church bells ring on any day but Sunday, the church will be fined and the bishop will go to jail.

### WITCHY WOMAN

It wasn't the bonfire in her yard that prompted Brenna Barney's neighbors in Waukesha, Wisconsin, to call the cops—it was her incessant chanting. Barney is a practicing Wiccan, and she was performing elaborate rituals "in celebration of the New Moon." When the police arrived, Barney fought back (which led to a resisting-arrest charge), arguing that they were violating her religious rights. The cops disagreed. So did her neighbor, Vicki Denova, who defended the 911 call: "To be honest, your choice is your choice as long as you're not affecting other people."

### REVENGE OF THE NOISE-MAKERS

In the middle of the night in May 2009, Marsha Coleman of Salem, Oregon, couldn't sleep because of the loud party going on next door. So she went over and asked the neighbors to *please* keep it down. Bad move: After she got back home, some of the drunken revelers showed up on her porch and banged repeatedly on her door. Frightened, she called 911. A deputy rushed to Coleman's house and was in the middle of taking her statement when they heard another series of loud knocks on the door. Then they heard a slurring voice yell, "This is the Marion County Sheriff!" The deputy opened the door and found one of the partiers, 32-year-old David Bueno, whose party ended right there, as he was arrested for impersonating an officer and disturbing the peace.

*For more people and machines driving us crazy  
with their incessant noise, cover your ears  
and head over to page 409.*

## LOUD NOISES!!!

*On page 266, we told you about some of the more common sources of noise pollution—car stereos, loud parties, and Wiccan priestesses. Here are a few more stories full of sound and fury.*

### CRAZY COMMERCIALS

**C**You're curled up on the couch watching your favorite TV show. Something really dramatic happens, the scene fades to black, and before you know it, your television erupts into loud music, glaring colors, and some announcer yelling, "There's never been a better time to buy a Toyota!" To curb this annoyance, in 2009 Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-California) introduced legislation called the Commercial Advertisement Loudness Mitigation act, or CALM, which will fine stations for airing "excessively noisy or strident" commercials. But even if the law passes, it may prove hard to enforce. That's because in the United States, the FCC already controls how loud a station can broadcast. TV shows rarely, if ever, reach the maximum level. Advertisers, however, push the entire 30 seconds to the highest level. "If someone sets off a camera flash every now and then, it's one thing," writes Spencer Critchley in *Digital Audio* magazine. "If they aim a steady spotlight into your eyes it's another, even if the peak brightness is no higher."

### OH, THE iRONY

The Apple iPod was designed to be an "instrument of solitude," where the listener can retreat to his or her library of music while not forcing it upon others. But a 2007 *Associated Press* article reported that people who don't own the devices have complained to Apple that the iPod itself is a growing source of noise pollution. That's because the listeners who put the little ear buds on—while on a bus or plane, or in their cubicle or a waiting room—are often unaware that the tinny sound can be heard by anyone within about 10 feet. "Like the cell phone," said the article, "the iPod can foster a sense of apathy when the user is among strangers. It's easier to blow off social norms—and channel Justin Timberlake during rush hour—when you don't know whom you're irritating."

## GOING GREEN THE LOUD WAY

Farmers in Massachusetts have been furious since a taxpayer-subsidized solar panel factory was built on nearby land in January 2009. The plant is so noisy that, according to the *Boston Herald*, “Their horses have ulcers, the ducks have disappeared, and a dog has started gnawing off doorknobs.” Said one farmer, “Imagine tuning your radio to a station that gets only static. Then imagine having to listen to that 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That’s what we are living with. It’s like our tax dollars are being used to torture us.” The plant has since hired a “noise specialist” to try to figure out how to dampen some of the sounds (after the factory was threatened with fines of \$1,000 per day). A spokesman apologized, but said that making solar panels is a “loud business.”

## A WAKE-UP CALL

In a recent study conducted by Imperial College London, scientists measured the heart and brain activity of people who lived near four major European airports (including England’s Heathrow, which has had a long history of noise-pollution controversy). Every time a plane flew overhead, the subjects’ blood pressure went up, even when they were asleep. It wasn’t just the jet engines that did it: Whenever any significant “noise event” occurred—described as 35 decibels or more (a passing car with a loud engine, or drunk people shouting in the street)—the subjects’ blood pressure raised to dangerous levels. And there was a direct correlation: the louder the noise, the higher the blood pressure. That makes for restless nights, which leads to stressful days.

## THOSE DAMN KIDS!

An 82-year-old German man was fed up by an annoying song coming in through his window. It happened in the morning, the afternoon, and the middle of the night. He kept yelling out his window for the neighborhood kids to shut up, but the song would start playing again. It was so annoying that he finally called the police—who instantly solved the case. How? An officer found a greeting card on the man’s windowsill. It was the kind that has a tiny speaker inside and plays a song every time the card shakes... which happened every time a breeze came in through the window. The man was “happy, relieved, and a little embarrassed.”