

Please PIPEDOWN

The source for news about the campaign for freedom from piped music.

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Hello Pipedowners

April 16, 2008 was International Noise Awareness Day. This event was sponsored by the League for the Hard of Hearing. Check out their web site at <http://www.lhh.org/> In particular, the link on their site to "NOISE" provides a great deal of useful information on the dangers of noise not only to hearing.

This newsletter is dedicated to bringing awareness to the problem of too-loud music in businesses that potentially impacts the hearing health of workers and customers.

More and more studies have been done concerning the noise exposure and hearing loss of employees in entertainment venues.

Just recently, restaurant reviewer Tom Sietsenna talked about the potential risk to restaurant workers when he observed noise levels in the Washington Post. His recent on-line article and reader discussions point to the number of people who really do not like loud restaurants. Noise in general as well as piped-in music contributed to some of the too-loud atmosphere. He promises to begin including noise ratings along with his restaurant reviews.

The San Francisco Chronicle has included a noise rating in its restaurant reviews for a few years now. The ratings are 1 to 4 BELLS for noise levels with a BOMB assigned to the extremely loud.

As a suggestion to all readers, if your local restaurant reviewer does not mention noise levels in his or her reviews, perhaps you could suggest it to them.

No Longer Background Music

Joseph Lanza's book, "Elevator Music", talks primarily about "background" music, music that was not intended to take over a space and suppress communication. What has evolved from the initial ideas about program audio is the need by marketing managers to impart their audio messages to business patrons. Today's program audio is no longer in the background and is intended to be more of a direct influence over the occupants of a space than ever before.

In a recent social setting I had the fortunate opportunity to speak to an audio technician who works for a major provider of "program audio" (his words). More and more local control of the program audio volume has been removed. Many venues today have had baseline background noise measurements taken before activating the music and video. Then active local background noise detectors are coupled with sophisticated computer control systems to dynamically adjust the volume. Many of these systems are set up to have the program audio adjusted to levels ABOVE the background noise. Not only are the computer-controlled systems set to above background, but so are many of the systems still under the direct control of business employees.

The concern with these more "foreground" audio systems is their potential impact to workers and patrons. The impact of too-loud worker environments is a topic covered in news articles and by TV investigative reporters.

Comment cards

Comments cards are still available to help when asking businesses to please turn down the music. In addition to the comments directed at the business owner/manager, I have some that invite others to join our cause. I will provide more of these cards to those who send a SASE.

News from readers

Thanks go to Dr. Louis Hagler, who provided me with information about some of the specific studies that point to the increasing risk to the hearing of young people when exposed to personal stereo equipment and modern entertainment venues including nightclubs.

A recent web search turned up the term socio-acousis (sociocusis) that describes the non-occupational noise induced hearing loss associated with recreation, hobbies, etc. Let's hope the ever-increasing noise levels aren't to be fueled by more and more program audio.

Advice: The importance of practicing.

My advice in this newsletter is to all the people who support Pipedown-USA and who want to be able to successfully ask businesses to please turn down the music. Please practice your asking of businesses as often as possible.

This often involves learning to ignore rude remarks or even laughter from those who do not understand.

For me, learning how to ask to have the music turned down is a continuous learning experience. Speaking up brings both success and failure in gaining accommodation. I find practicing to be very important in my attempts to persuade business owners that their public places should be quieter. Practicing has helped me learn how to answer the common objections to my requests and has taught me the importance of remaining civil in my discussions. It is too easy to lose one's temper when faced with lack of understanding about how the noise bothers someone.

I am not always successful, as the case was with two very recent requests. The first request was at a health-care provider. When I asked for the music to be turned off I was asked "Why". My answer was because my hearing problem made it difficult to hear over the music. The conversation was turned away from the music to other noisy environments and my request was ignored. The second occasion was at a hairdressers where I had to wait for a relatively quiet moment to ask for the music to be turned down. I was accommodated by the stylist in having the music turned off completely and was told that there was another customer that had been asking for this accommodation.

For those experiencing the response from management or employees that "You are the first one to complain about this" your reply can be "Well, this is the first opportunity I have had to complain". I suspect the "you are the only one" is an anti-complaint technique designed to unnerve the asker, so responding in a like manner may at least get the attention of the person taking the complaint.

Bibliography

"Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy Listening, and Other Moodson", Joseph Lanza, 1995, St. Martin's Press. ISBN 0-312-10540-1.

Sweetow R, Tate L: "I'll Have a Side Order of Earplugs, Please": *Audiology Today* 12(3). 40, 2000

In the works

This newsletter could use some pictures or graphics. If anyone has suggestions for graphical input for this newsletter they would be most welcome. Pipedown in the UK has a lovely "X" directly over a set of speakers along with a "hands over the ears" sketch. Suggestions or original art would be much appreciated..

Quote

"Examples: Stores which have young salespeople who like to *feel* the loud background music as well as hear it. You can't hear and they have trouble understanding you (they've already begun losing *their* hearing). Or a busy supermarket with people talking nearby, registers ringing, that background music again. Avoid such places whenever possible. If you must go, do the best you can and then leave. (Store managers take note: do you want to continue discouraging or driving away up to 20% of *your* customers?)"

Hearing Loss Help, by Alex Combs, Alpenglow Press, Revised September 1988. ISBN 0-935997-14-8 (Paperback)