

Helping People Suffering from Noise Pollution: An Outreach Approach

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Overview

Pollution is an ever-increasing and ever-present problem worldwide. Often we discuss problems associated with litter, combustion of fossil fuels, oil leaks, and other harmful activities that harm our environment: the water, land, and air around us. Among these pollutants is one that sometimes slips through the cracks: noise. Noise is an incredibly harmful pollutant, yet not much awareness is raised or action taken to fight back against it. This pollutant plagues individuals and communities, often composed of marginalized groups, who don't know where to turn for support.

Quiet Communities, a nonprofit organization, seeks to provide information, support, and solutions for noise sufferers. They have a goal of “promoting quiet as a valuable natural resource” and are working to address “harmful noise because quieter settings are healthier for people and the environment”.¹ Founded by Jamie Banks in 2013, it serves as one of the few resources for people experiencing this issue, and yet the organization can only do so much in the face of overwhelming corporate activity and the lack of governmental action. Two sufferers in particular, Jamie Lutz from Kentucky and Cathy Bishop from Ohio, have been working with Banks and Quiet Communities in an attempt to alleviate some of their struggles.

In order to support Quiet Communities and these individuals, I, along with students Delila Lapidus and Rylan Florence, commenced an outreach campaign. We reached out to any individuals or groups that could have a hand in solving or causing the problems, with an aim of promoting awareness and generating change. Many others, along with Cathy and Jamie, continue to fight for their peace, so both institutional and grassroots efforts must continue in order to make the world a safer place for those suffering from noise pollution.

¹ <https://www.quietcommunities.org/>

Commented [1]: I know it is meant to be an overview of our individual findings - which the research I have done is all my own, the campaign was done together so I mentioned Delila and Rylan. I do only go over specifics for the letters I was sending, but I can omit our names completely if that would be a better way to present the work.

Noise Pollution

If noise pollution is such a serious problem, what falls into the definition of noise pollution? Noise pollution is generally defined as any sound that is unwanted. It can be caused by many common items or experiences, like lawn mowers or concerts, that disrupt the standard flow of life.² It is also present in larger forms, like traffic, airplane flights, and general industry or construction endeavors.³ Currently, one major cause of noise pollution is data centers. They are used to process internet data, and are often associated with Artificial Intelligence, as well as the severe draining of resources.⁴ As artificial intelligence increases in popularity, so too will these data centers worsen the problem. There are already around 600 facilities in Virginia, impacting the local people and wildlife.⁵ Noise pollution can also disrupt the regular functioning of land and sea animals, throwing the natural world into disarray.⁶ Noise pollution causes serious health problems that must be addressed. In 2018, the World Health Organization calculated that 1.6 million years of healthy life were lost because of traffic noise in the EU⁷. Noise pollution stresses cognition, the heart, and blood vessels; it has been shown to lower test scores for children, increase hyperactivity, induce stress, and create other problems⁸. This kind of pollution is incredibly impactful and its reach is only getting stronger, emphasizing the necessity for action to protect the planet and the beings on it from noise.

² <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/noise-pollution/>

³ <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/law/noise-pollution-overview>

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/17/nx-s1-5469933/virginia-data-centers-residents-saying-no>

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/17/nx-s1-5469933/virginia-data-centers-residents-saying-no>

⁶ <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/noise-pollution/>

⁷ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/everyday-noises-can-hurt-hearts-not-just-ears-and-the-ability-to-learn/>

⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26231366/>

Existing Laws

In the United States, the central national law surrounding noise pollution control is the Noise Control Act, established by the EPA in 1972. It functions as a national policy, setting federal standards for noise emissions, with 70db being the standard to prevent hearing loss. Along with the establishment of the NCA came the creation of ONAC: the office of noise abatement and control. ONAC was created to coordinate all federal noise-control related activities, like studies and investigations regarding the impact of noise on public health.⁹ Additionally, The Quiet Communities Act, added in 1978 as an amendment to the NCA promoted funding and assistance for local and state noise control programs.¹⁰ However, ONAC was defunded in 1981, thereby placing the responsibility of noise control action in the hands of local and state governments.¹¹ The stipulations of the NCA still remain, but without the office there to coordinate research and action, suggestions are even more difficult to carry out.

The Occupational Safety and Health administration also set some national workplace noise exposure standards, requiring hearing conservation programs and administrative controls if workers are consistently being exposed to noise over a certain sound level. Constant and prolonged exposure over 85dB calls for hearing conservation for employees.¹² They also have an app anyone can download and use. OSHA has great protective standards, but of course is limited to occupational hazards, so it doesn't directly change noise pollution for the general public.

⁹ <https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-noise-control-act>

¹⁰ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-bill/3083/summary/00>

¹¹ <https://www.acus.gov/document/implementation-noise-control-act#:~:text=After%20the%20EPA's%20funding%20for%20the%20Office.and%20local%20governments%20from%20adopting%20different%20standards.>

¹² <https://www.osha.gov/noise>

However, steps taken to protect employees are important and should be prioritized. Furthermore, it could lead to changes in noise-emitting machinery, which could then lead to overall sound reduction that benefits the community as a whole.

Case Studies

Jamie Lutz - Manitou, Kentucky

Jamie Lutz's family has lived in Manitou, an unincorporated community in Hopkins County, Kentucky, for generations. She's a mother of two children and is an integral part of the Wolf Hollow community she resides in. She shared that her community used to be a vibrant space for families and neighborhood get-togethers. Now, she compares her neighborhood to a "ghost town" as noise makes it impossible to hold a conversation outside. She is unable to sleep and wakes up with migraines every morning. She has suffered from migraine headaches, high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, agitation, hearing loss, diabetes, and an enlarged heart. Her six year old daughter is unable to focus in school. They both often sleep in a hall closet, the quietest place in the house as it is windowless and guarded by more walls.

The cause of this problem? The Warrior Coal Mine located just a few hundred yards away, owned by Alliance Resource Partners. Alliance is a major production company, and the Warrior Coal mine itself produced 4.4 millions tons of coal in 2024.¹³ Jamie has been experiencing noise issues for over a decade now, describing it as a "constant whining." She experiences this irritating noise at nearly all hours of the day, along with sound from construction vehicles and the physical reverberations from underground mining. The source of the noise pollution is believed to be outdated machinery, specifically cooling fans that have outlived their

¹³ <https://www.arlp.com/our-businesses/coal-operations/>

period of proper functioning. This is bad for residents having to deal with heightened sound, but also worker safety.

This level of noise disruption is in violation of the recommendations and principles laid out by the NCA. Furthermore, it violates the municipal code of Hopkins County, which states that “Emission of noise that is noxious enough to destroy the enjoyment of dwellings or other uses of property in the vicinity by interfering with the ordinary comforts of human existence” should be regulated.¹⁴ She has sought support from Warrior Coal itself, but has met with no answer from the company. She has asked the Mine Safety and Health administration, Expert Environmental Consulting, the EPA, local law enforcement, and more. She has reached out to all the officials she can find at all levels of government, but she has found no support.

Cathy Bishop - Mansfield, Ohio

In Mansfield, a city in Richland County, Ohio, a woman named Cathy Bishop lives in the house that her father built. The house holds many fond memories, but recently, the increasingly constant presence of severe noise has drowned out anything else. Also located in Mansfield is the Mansfield Works steel plant. A change in ownership in 2019 made the plant the property of Cleveland Cliffs, a company manufacturing steel products. Cathy’s issue began at a similar time to the change in management, indicating it also led to a change of machinery. Cathy describes the noise as a constant industrial hum, and it is likely that the noise is produced from the steel-rolling sections of the plant, part of the steel refinement process.

¹⁴ https://library.municode.com/ky/hopkins_county/codes/code_of_ordinances

This causes problems for Cathy and the community as a whole. Cathy had hoped to live in her family home for the rest of her life, however the noise pollution has forced her to look towards leaving. Her son won't stay overnight at her house any more, and she can't blame him as her own health has declined, and she has ended up with heart problems and constant anxiety. Her neighbors are likely subject to similar problems. This also impacts those who work at the plant, as, on average, 80% of steelworkers display symptoms of hearing loss.¹⁵ Cathy has sought support from multiple people and has been met with silence from the company and a lack of action from anyone else.

Outreach Campaign

Jamie and Cathy are only two instances of myriad cases of severe noise pollution harming faultless individuals. The first step to solving these problems is to ensure that people, especially those with power, know that they exist. This way, those causing issues are confronted with their impacts, and are perhaps inspired to make change. Also, those with enforcement or legal power will then be able to pressure them even further.

Following this principle, the outreach campaign targeted multiple groups. These groups included the coal and steel companies, worker unions, elected officials, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Jamie and Cathy's stories were shared to those impacting their respective cases, and general noise pollution explanations were included to further promote

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<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6413740/#:~:text=As%20shown%20in%20Table%205,hearing%20loss%20at%20high%20frequencies.>

knowledge. More detailed lists of representatives are included below, with Kentucky-based messages in red and Ohio in blue.

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Representative Type	Kentucky Representative	Ohio Representative
Federal House members	Rep. James Comer	Rep. Jim Jordan
Federal Senators	Sen. Mitch McConnell Sen. Rand Paul	Sen. Bernie Moreno Sen. John Husted
State governors	Gov. Andy Beshear	Gov. Mike DeWine
State senators	Sen. Robby Mills	Sen. Mark Romanchuk
State representatives	Rep. Wade Williams	Rep. Marilyn John
City mayors	n/a (unincorporated community)	Mayor Jodie Perry
State Attorney Generals	Dave Yost	Russell Coleman

Government Groups	
Office of Civil and Environmental Law	Ohio Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Consumer and Environmental Protection	Department of Health
Department for Environmental Protection	Air Quality Development Authority
Energy and Environment Cabinet	Department of Public Safety
Education and Labor Cabinet	Richland Public Health
Division of Public Health Protection and Safety	

Non-Government Groups
Access for Rural Community Health
Association for Environmental Education
Kentucky Resources Council
North Central Ohio Land Conservatory

Thus far, there has been no response in the month or so since messages were initially sent out. There is still the possibility of future responses. In any case, the act of putting pressure on these groups and individuals is still beneficial for the overall cause.

Future Actions

There is still considerable work to be done to help Jamie and Cathy and other people in similar situations. Further follow up outreach could be done to stimulate responses and actions. More support and contact for those suffering, as well as a way for them to get in contact with

each other, are necessary actions that can be taken by ordinary people. Further, independent research can dive deeper into instances of noise pollution and the future of noise pollution, to best know how to advocate surrounding this issue.

Policy changes are also necessary to ensure stricter enforcement of noise control. For instance, the EU has an Environmental Noise Directive (END) that requires EU countries to create noise maps and action plans every 5 years for heavy traffic transportation areas and highly populated areas.¹⁶ Furthermore, national authorities are required to consult the “concerned public” to best promote a safe and peaceful environment. The US could adopt a similar policy, taking clear and preventative actions to support their citizens from this increasingly harmful pollutant. Even without a policy change at the national level, the NCA allows for states and local areas to create stronger rules and enforcements. Some states, like California or New Jersey do have more extensive noise prevention and remediation policies, and other states could follow in their footsteps in order to improve.¹⁷ A multi-pronged approach is certainly needed to combat noise pollution, where individuals, groups, and the government work together to combat noise pollution in different ways. This sort of action is absolutely necessary to protect the interests of the people, so that they can stop listening and start living again.

¹⁶ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/noise/environmental-noise-directive_en

¹⁷ <https://www.nonoise.org/lawlib/states/states.htm>

References

- <https://www.quietcommunities.org/>
- <https://www.arlp.com/our-businesses/coal-operations/>
- <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6413740/#:~:text=As%20shown%20in%20Table%205,hearing%20loss%20at%20high%20frequencies.>
- https://library.municode.com/ky/hopkins_county/codes/code_of_ordinances
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