

Make Some Noise about International Noise Awareness Day with Extech Sound Level Meters

Waltham, MA – Extech Instruments (www.extech.com) is working to heighten awareness of the real health dangers of long-term exposure to noise on the 15th annual International Noise Level Awareness Day, Wednesday, April 28, 2010, taking place during Noise Action Week.

From Nuisance to Health Threat

For some communities, at its most basic level, noise is considered a nuisance threat to the enjoyment of peace and quiet. More and more, it is also being evaluated however as a growing, detrimental environmental factor that can cause hearing loss and other physiological problems.

Attorney and legal journalist Dennis Beaver recently explored the issue of noise in restaurants in his "You and the Law" column. Beaver identified a troubling trend in newer restaurants following prevailing design styles that concoct a noisy cocktail of blaring background music, open kitchens, stark décor, hardwood floors, high ceilings, and stack stone walls all for the sake of an *en vogue* atmosphere. Not only did Beaver discover that noise is fast-becoming a nuisance issue for restaurant patrons seeking a "nice quiet dinner out," it may also be a health risk for them and a potential occupational hazard for restaurant workers who endure prolonged exposure. (Read the article here:

http://www.hanfordsentinel.com/news/opinion/columnists/article_b219a5d8-4fee-11df-9674-001cc4c03286.html)

According to the International Noise Level Awareness Day founding organization, the Center for Hearing and Communication, continuous exposure to noise above 85 decibels can be harmful to hearing. Documented research has found noise does not have to be that loud to lead to physiological changes in blood pressure, sleep, digestion and other stress-related disorders. Studies exist also documenting the harmful effects of noise on children's learning and behavior.

"It is time to address the threat that noise poses to hearing, health, learning and behavior," says Amy Boyle, Director of Public Education at the Center for the Hard of Hearing. This year the Center is once again spearheading a special effort to inform the public of the necessity of creating a quiet home, school and recreational environment. "It is time" Boyle says, "that we take responsibility to quiet our surroundings and create a healthy environment for us and our children."

"You have the right to remain...quiet"

Early noise pollution laws in the late 1960s and 1970s were valuable first steps to recognize the harmful effects of noise but many of them relied solely on the hearing of officials subjectively determining whether noise was excessive. As a result, the effectiveness of these early noise laws was undermined by questions contesting the validity of excessive noise claims. Decades later, laws have been upgraded or introduced to reflect the science of sound and hearing health by specifying certain decibel levels at which noise is considered excessive and harmful.

According to an April 26, 2010 article in the *New York Daily News*, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg "pushed a new noise code three years ago to lower the town's volume to 75 decibels, creating 45 noise cops to enforce it." Read how John Cochary of the Center for Hearing and Communication recently used an Extech digital sound level meter (model 407750) to monitor typical noise levels that New York's noise cops might encounter, recording a 102.8 decibel reading underground in a Big Apple subway station. (http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2010/04/26/2010-04-26_3_years_after_edict_noise_still_annoy_eh_huh.html)

Extech digital sound level meters have been at the forefront of efforts to monitor and measure noise levels around the world, quantifying noise disturbances in a surprising variety of environments so that law enforcement, workplace health officials, hospital environmental directors, and other compliance agents are armed with indisputable data that can be used to determine when a violation is taking place.

For Limited Budgets, Cost as Important as Accuracy

Digital sound level meters are clearly the must-have tool for anyone enforcing noise issues. The major challenge facing so-called “noise cops” enforcing noise ordinances is the lack of sound level meters. Many noise meters of the caliber that conform to current standards (Type 2, ANSI and IEC) cost several thousand dollars each. As a result, numerous officials end up sharing one or two meters. And, as budgets shrink in this economy, the likelihood of buying more is further hampered.

By working with a sound level meter maker that can offer capable meters at a fraction of that cost, police departments can maintain their momentum in equipping officers with individual meters.

Noise meters such as the Extech HD600 sound level meter offer compliance officials the specifications they need to get the job done effectively without breaking the budget. With a suggested retail price of \$499.99, the high accuracy HD600 from Extech offers the capabilities of meters costing 4 times as much. As part of the Heavy Duty series of meters from Extech, the HD600 is made to last through every day, rough-and-tumble use with a double-molded housing to resist impacts. Plus, routine calibration is available directly from Extech to ensure the meter is calibrated to NIST standards, making its high accuracy readings indisputable.

(Extech offers over a dozen sound level meter models with varying capabilities ranging in price from \$89.99 to \$999.99. Learn more by visiting: <http://www.extech.com/instruments/categories.asp?catid=18>)

Taking Baby Steps to Healthy Noise Levels

Extech sound level monitoring tools have also been used in places you would never imagine. Take for example, the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at Elliot Hospital in Manchester, New Hampshire where specialized doctors and nurses address the unique needs of premature babies. As part of the hospital’s efforts to implement industry requirements for newborn ICUs, Extech’s innovative, table-top or wall-mountable Sound Level Alert (SL130) was installed in each patient room in the NICU directly on the head wall, next to the noisiest equipment and close to the baby’s head for optimal monitoring. If a noise level higher than 60 decibels occurs, the Extech Sound Level Alert displays visual alerts (flashing “OVER” text and jumbo LEDs) and triggers a remote amber light. The remote, ceiling-mounted light is covered by a dome, allowing a glow that is bright enough to be seen by the NICU staff but soft enough not disturb the babies.

Liz Castrogiovanni, MS, RN and the department director of the NICU and Pediatric/Adolescent Unit at Elliot Hospital has had 15 Extech Sound Level Alerts installed in the NICU and has found that the Extech monitors have been instrumental in helping the staff perform its noise abatement procedures. “If a NICU does not have these products, they are doing their patients, hospital and staff a disservice,” she said.

(Learn more about the Extech SL130 here: <http://www.extech.com/instruments/product.asp?catid=18&prodid=231>)

Extech is also working with Harvard Medical School researchers at the NICU at Brigham & Women’s Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. Innovative research is underway to evaluate the benefits of reduced noise levels complemented by prerecorded maternal sounds. These recordings attempt to simulate sounds in the womb and are played back in the NICU environment as a way hopefully to reduce the health complications that preemies endure and enhance their ability to thrive.

Taking Action on International Noise Awareness Day

On the fifteenth anniversary of International Noise Awareness Day, visit the Center for Hearing and Communication's website to learn how to take action and also access valuable resources and activities including a "Quiet Diet," free hearing screenings, dissemination of hearing protection, school-based curriculum materials, fact-sheet distribution and more: <http://www.chchearing.org/noise-center-home/international-noise-awareness-day/getting-started>. For international resources to help individuals "Say NO to noise," visit the UK-based Noise Action Week website: <http://www.noiseactionweek.org.uk/>

Getting Equipped with Sound Level Meters:

Visit <http://www.extech.com/instruments/categories.asp?catid=18> for additional details and specifications on Extech's range of sound level meters. Extech meters are available at popular distributors (<http://distributor.extech.com>) and retailers. To shop with online retailers, use Google's Product Search: www.google.com/products.

About Extech Instruments, a FLIR Company

Headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts, USA, Extech Instruments is one of the largest suppliers of test and measurement equipment worldwide. Founded in 1971, Extech is known for its depth and breadth of products and its innovation in providing instruments with unique combinations of features that make them highly useful and very convenient. All Extech meters are distributed worldwide through leading representatives, distributors and OEMs. The company is ISO 9001 2000 certified and is a wholly owned subsidiary of FLIR Systems, Inc.

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