

## EU noise directive

**25th February 2002, in a written question, Mr Wray had asked the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the EU Noise Directive; and what restrictions this will place on sources of excessive noise apart from aircraft.**

**In reply, Mr Meacher said**

*'The proposed directive relating to the Assessment and Management of Environmental Noise would establish common methods for measuring and assessing environmental noise. As presently drafted it would also require member states to designate authorities to map noise levels in local areas and*

*develop noise action plans. Maps would be publicised locally and local people consulted in drawing up the action plans. The requirement for mapping and action plans would apply to major roads, railways and airports and urban agglomerations. Summary information would be collected by the European Commission and used to inform future Community noise policy. It would not be the purpose of this directive to place restrictions on sources of noise.'*

## Noisy neighbours

**21st March 2002, in the adjournment debate on Noisy Neighbours,**

**Mr Elliot Morley, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for**

**Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said, in reply to Bob Russell Lib-Dem member for Colchester,**

*'The hon. Member for Colchester has raised a serious issue thoughtfully and comprehensively. I hope that my response shows that we as a Government take it seriously and that we are trying to deal with it through a range of actions. Local council environmental health officers, supported by the police, are on the front line. I pay tribute to their thorough work which is often carried out in difficult circumstances, but is often highly successful. We intend to give them the tools and the powers they need to do that job, and we are consulting on the best means of doing so. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will take into account the points he has made tonight in future considerations.'*

**– more from parliament on page 16**

### Computer hazard

Computer games which vibrate to heighten the sense of realism may pose a danger to children and should carry health warnings, doctors say. Prolonged use of such games could be linked with hand-arm vibration syndrome or vibration white finger, a debilitating condition usually caused by continued exposure to vibrating work tools. Researchers, including Gavin Cleary, a specialist registrar at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital in London, described a case of a boy of 15, who spent up to seven hours a day playing computer games, and particularly enjoyed driving games using the vibration mode on the hand-held control device. They said the boy visited hospital with a two-year history of painful hands. His hands became white and swollen when exposed to the cold, and red and painful when he warmed them up. Writing in the British Medical Journal, the researchers said: "We believe that, with increasing numbers of children playing these devices, there should be consideration for statutory health warnings to advise users and parents."

### Cinema attack

A couple were viciously attacked by two adults after asking two boys to be quiet while watching *The Lord of the Rings* in a packed cinema. Andrew Morse and his fiancée Becky Brown, both 26, were unable to concentrate as the boys, aged about 14, swore repeatedly and used mobile telephones. They were subjected to a torrent of abuse when they told them to be quiet and reported the disturbance to staff at the Odeon, Doncaster. When Mr Morse, an engineer, and Miss Brown, who works with autistic children, left at the end they were attacked by the parents of one of the boys. Mr Morse's nose was broken and his lip cut. Miss Brown received a black eye, cut nose and bruised ribs.

# parliament

## – parliament continued from page 8

### Traffic noise pollution

**26th March 2002, Mr Clifton-Brown had asked, in a written question to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what policies the Government have in place to reduce traffic noise pollution, and if he will make a statement.**

**In reply Mr Jamieson said,**

*'Since 1996 all new vehicles have had to meet stringent noise standards before entering service. No further reductions in noise limits are planned in the short term but the UK is participating in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Working Group on vehicle noise which is examining the scope for further noise reductions. Requirements restricting the noise from tyres are being introduced in stages from this year in accordance with EU Directive 2001/43/EC. The 10-year Transport Plan extended the Government's commitment to reducing trunk road noise by stating that*

*lower noise road surfacing will be used for all future maintenance and new construction work. All concrete roads on the national network will be resurfaced with this quieter material by March 2011. Current plans are that at the end of the 10-year Plan period some 60 per cent. of the national road network will have a lower noise surface. A programme of work is also underway to provide noise mitigation measures on certain trunk roads built or altered before 1988 prior to current methods of assessing traffic noise being adopted.'*

### Night time deliveries

**26th March 2002, in a written question, Mrs Dunwoody had asked the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will announce a relaxation of night time delivery curfews for gas-powered trucks; what studies he has made of the impact on the environment in the**

**neighbourhood around supermarkets; and what definitions he will apply to the relevant vehicles.**

**Mr Spellar replied,**

*'My Department is currently involved in a joint initiative by the Commission for Integrated Transport and the Freight Transport Association to explore the scope for Local Authorities to consider flexibility in delivery restrictions in exchange for better environmental performance by the distribution industry resulting in less disturbance to local residents. The aim is to develop a Code of Practice which would result in a significant reduction in the noise and other nuisance commonly associated with urban deliveries. This would enable deliveries to be carried out outside peak congestion hours, more flexibly and efficiently with fewer vehicles. Improved distribution would also help to ensure that products are available on the shelves at the times people want to buy them. The use of gas-powered vehicles might be amongst the appropriate "best practice" measures considered by local authorities in determining whether to ease delivery restrictions.'*

## – more from parliament on page 36

### Supermarket depot

From Lord Lloyd Webber's grand 16th century manor house the sound of cars and lorries on the A339, which runs between Basingstoke and Greenham Common and cuts through the estate, is a distant rumble. The pastoral tranquillity is, however, under threat. A new battle over nearby Greenham Common, the former American cruise missile base which was the scene of years of protests in the 1980s, is under way. There are some changes. The new generation of Greenham Common protesters which is replacing the women peace campaigners is markedly different, not only because it includes men and well-heeled local residents. The objects of their concern are no longer nuclear weapons, but hundreds of lorries. Their "enemy" is not American military might, but the "evil empire" of a giant supermarket chain. Sainsbury's, the object of their wrath, is awaiting final approval to build a £100 million warehouse, almost 2,000ft long and 63ft high, on the former military base. If it goes ahead, 700 lorries will trundle in and out of the depot every day and night along the A339, taking food to stores in west London and along the M4 corridor. The distant rumble on Lord Lloyd-Webber's estate will be transformed into a 24-hour cacophony.

noise notes

# parliament

## – parliament continued from page 16

### Insulation grants

**25th April 2002, in a written question, Mr Cousins had asked the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what grants are available for noise insulation.**

**In reply Mr Jamieson said,**

*'No such grants are available centrally.*

*There are statutory requirements for the provision of noise insulation in specified circumstances, in respect of noise from various sources. Under the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 the appropriate highway authority will provide insulation in the form of secondary glazing to the windows and glazed doors, of dwellings and other buildings used for residential purposes, or payment of grants for this purpose, where such properties are not more than 300 m from the nearest point of a new highway, including an additional carriageway added to an existing highway, or an alteration affecting the line or level of an existing highway. The provision of insulation or grant is subject to there being an increase, or expected increase, in noise on the facade of the property attributable to the traffic on the new or altered highway from that prevailing before construction started, provided this*

*is above a prescribed level.*

*Under the Noise Insulation (Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems) Regulations 1996 an authority responsible for constructing a new railway, tramway or other guided transport system, or for adding to an existing system, has a similar duty to provide insulation for dwellings and other buildings used for residential purposes, or to pay grant for that purpose.*

*Similar statutory schemes have been made under S79 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, and previous powers, requiring provision of noise insulation in respect of aircraft noise at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. At other airports, noise insulation may be provided on a voluntary basis or in accordance with planning conditions.*

*Noise insulation schemes under any of these statutory provisions are subject to qualifying dates: they are not open-ended.*

*Local housing authorities could consider whether it would be appropriate to award a discretionary Home Repair Assistance grant to private home owners and tenants for noise insulation. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, if enacted, will provide authorities with a new general power which they could also use to this end.'*

### Assessment of risks of chronic exposure to loud noise

**11th June 2002, in a written question, Mrs May had asked the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made as to the impact on (a) children and (b) adults of being chronically exposed to loud noise.**

**Ms Blears said in reply,**

*As part of a joint programme with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health commissioned a research programme designed to study the non-auditory health effects of noise.*

*Five research projects were funded under this programme, three of which concentrated on the non-auditory effects of noise on children at school and in the home, one concentrated on the effects of occupational noise and the fifth concentrated on noise and insomnia.*

*The five projects have recently completed and reported, and the results of the research will be discussed with colleagues from other Departments later in the year.*

*Full details of the study are available on the Department's website at [www.doh.gov.uk/hef/airpol/aipolh.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/hef/airpol/aipolh.htm).*

## – more from parliament on page 39

### OAE

The measurement of otoacoustic emissions (OAEs) is discussed in a research report, *Novel methods for the early identification of noise-induced hearing loss*, published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). An OAE is a release of sound energy from the inner ear, which can be recorded in the ear canal with a microphone. This detailed technical report, prepared by the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research at the University of Southampton, describes research to determine the suitability of OAEs in the long-term assessment of hearing in adults who are exposed to noise at work. The report finds that measurement of OAE has several advantages over conventional pure-tone audiometry.

noise notes

# parliament

## – parliament continued from page 36

### Exposure to noise

**10th June 2002, in a written question, Mrs May had asked the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the population was exposed to noise levels of (a) 55-65 dBL<sub>Aeq</sub> over 24 hours and (b) over 65 dBL<sub>Aeq</sub> over 24 hours in the last 12 months.**

**Mr. Meacher replied,**

*'The Government do not assess the number of people, across the whole country, exposed to noise every year and so there are no data relating specifically to the last 12 months. Such an exercise is, however, carried out periodically and levels outside dwellings were last measured, in 2000 for England and Wales and 2001 for Scotland and Northern Ireland, at over 1,000 sites in total, for a 24 hour period. The results of this National Noise Incidence Survey, which I announced on 20 May 2002, established that 24 per cent. of the population was exposed to noise levels between 55-65 dBL<sub>Aeq</sub> over 24 hours and 2 per cent. of the population was exposed to noise levels greater than 65 dBL<sub>Aeq</sub> over 24 hours. It should be noted that these dBL<sub>Aeq</sub> levels represent the "free field" values outside dwellings. Such levels outside dwellings (i.e. ignoring sound reflected back from the facade of the dwelling) are, of course, greater than the actual levels experienced from external sources inside the home. I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Libraries of both houses.'*

**Mrs. May also asked how many domestic noise complaints were received by**

**local authorities in each of the last three years.**

**Mr. Meacher replied,**

*'Figures for 2000-01, published by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), were announced by myself on 20 December 2001. These show a fall in the 2000-01 figures to 5,001 domestic noise complaints received by local authorities per million population, from 5,149 per million population in 1999-2000. In 1998-99 the figure was 4,330 domestic noise complaints per million population.'*

*'These figures are compiled using questionnaires returned by local authorities in England and Wales on an annual basis. This information has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and is also available on the DEFRA and CIEH websites.'*

Category of noise nuisance	Complaints per million population
<b>2000-01</b>	
Industrial	346
Commercial/leisure	1,038
Domestic	5,001
Construction/demolition sites	325
Vehicles	162
Equipment in the street	209
<b>1999-2000</b>	
Industrial	421
Commercial/leisure	960
Domestic	5,149
Construction/demolition sites	292
Vehicles	156
Equipment in the street	113
<b>1998-99</b>	
Industrial	444
Commercial/leisure	836
Domestic	4,330
Construction/demolition sites	248
Vehicles	146
Equipment in the street	107

### Airports changing for noise

**17th June 2002, Dr. Cable in a written question had asked the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2002, Official Report, column 375W, on airports, what further research has been commissioned and when the research is due to be reported; to whom the results will be published; who has been commissioned to carry out the research; and if he will make a statement.**

**Mr. Jamieson replied,**

*'Further research has been commissioned by the Department to reassess attitudes to aircraft noise in England; their correlation with the L<sub>eq</sub> noise index; and to examine (hypothetical) willingness to pay in respect of nuisance from such noise, in relation to other elements, on the basis of stated preference (SP) survey evidence.'*

*The consultation document "The Future of Aviation" (DETR December 2000) explained that further research into the monetary valuation of the effects of noise may be needed to inform charging strategies. The research is designed to underpin the Government's stated principle set out in "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" (Cm3950) that the aviation industry should meet the external costs it imposes.'*

*The research contract was awarded to a consortium led by the MVA Consultancy last November and is expected to last approximately three years. The work is split into two stages with Phase I focusing on i) the development of the sampling strategy and assessment of the feasibility of using Stated Preference techniques and ii) an*



*initial assessment of the Leq/annoyance relationship. This phase is expected to last until the end of the year. A decision to proceed to Phase II will depend on the Phase I findings. The results of the research will be disseminated widely.'*

## Eu noise directive

**The British view prevailed in February this year, when the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee voted to adopt measures which will realistically protect the hearing of employees' from noise.**

**without proving too demanding targets.**

*The European Parliament had threatened to adopt limits in excess of those already accepted by the U.K. Health & Safety Executive. Whilst the Engineering Employers' Federation firmly believes that good health and safety practice is part of best business practice, it says, the original limits proposed would have been unrealistic to meet for many businesses.*

*Most importantly for industry, following intense lobbying by the Engineering Employers' Federation, the proposed limit value 87dB(A) will now take account of the protection provided by ear-plugs and ear-muffs. This was the*

*position originally agreed by Council in the **Common Position** text. The dossier will go before a plenary session of the European Parliament in April.*

*The upper action value remains at 85dB(A). However, workers will be able to request hearing checks from the lower action value of 80dBA.*

*Gary Booton, Head of Health and Safety at the EEF said: "This is an acceptable compromise between the need to properly protect employees and support competitiveness. MEPs have listened to the concerns of manufacturing industry and on balance we are likely to end up with a Directive which is challenging yet realistic."*

### Work and hearing loss

A major finding of recent research commissioned by the Health & Safety Executive is that male construction workers are more than twice as likely to suffer severe hearing loss than the male working population as a whole. In construction workers, the prevalence of moderate or more severe hearing difficulty is 11.5%, against 5% for all occupations; and that of severe hearing difficulty is 5%, against 1.9% for all occupations. The research estimates that, nationally some 153,000 men and 26,000 women aged 35-64 years have severe hearing difficulties attributable to noise at work, and that 266,000 men and 84,000 women in this age band have attributable persistent tinnitus. Among men, hearing difficulty was most prevalent in transport and machinery operatives, construction workers, material moving and storage workers and repetitive assembly and inspection workers; in women, among cleaners and caterers.

### Clay pigeon shooting

One of Britain's most prestigious clay pigeon shooting grounds faces closure because new neighbours have complained about the noise. Stainfield Manor has hosted shooting for more than a century and has been used for 12 years to train Olympic and Commonwealth champions. Its shooting ground is now under threat because Keith and Lilian Baker, architects who moved into Stainfield Grange next door, have launched an action in the High Court to close it down because of the noise. The case illustrates the difficulty of marrying the aspirations of "townies" with the habits and traditions of rural areas.

### Call centre workers

Last year, the TUC made public the details of an out-of-court settlement of claim in respect of acoustic shock to a call-centre worker. The TUC revealed the settlement in a report marking the start of a campaign on pay and conditions in call centres. It describes acoustic shocks as freak sound bursts on telephone headsets that can leave victims in severe pain, with short-term memory loss and, in some cases, unable to work again. The sources of acoustic shocks are uncertain, but may include: customers tapping information into a mobile, feedback from mobiles, faxes, electrical faults, malicious acts and children blowing whistles down the phone.

### Wake-up call

A group of men parading noisily down a Jakarta street to wake Muslims for their pre-dawn Ramadan meal killed a resident who complained about the din, according to The Jakarta Post.