

Sounds like Christmas

A survey by Texas Instruments has shown that Americans will spend billions of dollars on gadgets containing electronic chips, as Christmas presents for their loved ones. Ranging from mobile phones to talking toys, with computers another favourite, the digits of electronics, as from a robotic hand, continue to develop their ever-strengthening grip on our lives and leisure.

Kids with Walkmans will irritate parents and others, with the rhythmic swish of overloud music leaking from overloaded earpieces. "Turn it down. I can hear it. You'll deafen yourself!"

Others will have succumbed to the claims of enthusiastic audio sales and commenced the slide from budding audiophile to naive audiophool. Well, if you spend too much money on a special loudspeaker cable which has, say, been mysteriously processed at very low temperatures, then you just

have to fool yourself into believing the claims made for it.

December is not the best month to be complaining about the megawatts of audio power which will be released into our homes before the month ends. But, their use continues long after the spirit of Christmas tolerance has faded.

How does a company justify producing a "home cinema" system with five loudspeakers, each driven by a 100W amplifier? A mere 2000 of these gives us the first megawatt! Over recent years, much of the additional power has gone into reproducing the bass, but typical domestic properties cannot contain low frequencies, leading to increased neighbour annoyance and more calls on the environmental protection authorities.

So here's an idea for Christmas. The audio companies make a donation to Local Authorities towards the cost of controlling their oversized products.

Dogs breed noise problems

Christina Cade is facing legal action after Breckland councillors agreed the problem at her premises at Woodgate Lane, Swanton Morley, near Dereham, Norfolk, had to be tackled urgently. About 200 dogs are housed in buildings and the number has grown as she has not had a licence to sell them. However, Miss Cade was told yesterday she had been granted the breeder's licence and will now be able to start finding new owners for the dogs. "What a relief it is for me. My whole problem is that I have been overstocked as I have not been able to sell dogs," she said. "I want to get the numbers down and now within two months I can get the number down to 100." Miss Cade spent nearly £90,000 on purpose-built kennels to house and she said it showed her commitment to her neighbours. She said much of the recent noise had been caused by having to have doors and windows open in the hot weather. "I apologise to anyone for causing noise. I have not spent all that money to still have a problem. I want to comply with the regulations and I know there are far too many dogs in the buildings. My aim is to live happily with everyone," she said. Miss Cade said she was upset that local people who had contacted the council about noise had not been to see her and she is also pursuing her own complaint about two council officers who visited her premises unannounced and while her 87-year-old mother was alone.

noise notes

Fundamental revision in Taiwan

The Taiwanese Cabinet recently approved draft revisions to the Noise Control Law that would require public transportation providers and government agencies to lower the levels of noise around highway, freeway, railway and mass rapid transit systems to acceptable levels or be fined for failing to live up to the standards. According to the amendment, the Taiwan Railway Administration, the National Freeway Bureau, or an MRT company will be fined NT\$20,000-NT\$100,000 if it fails to devise a concrete plan to reduce levels of noises produced by or derived from their systems within 180 days after receiving a complaint from local authorities responsible for population control. Both civilian and military airports around the island will also be required to introduce their noise control plans in order to protect the quality of living of those residents who live nearby those airports. The revisions will soon be sent to the Legislative Yuan for screening and final approval later this year. The law, which had become effective on January 8 this year, was a set of administrative rules before it was made into law by lawmakers late last year. Minister without Portfolio Lin Sheng-feng, who was responsible for screening the amendment drafted by the Environmental Protection Administration, said the amendment is necessary as it defines more clearly the responsibilities of various government agencies with regard to monitoring and cracking down on noise pollutions. Any agency or company that has failed to introduced its noise control plan after receiving a complaint from a local EPA official be fined up to NT\$100,000 for each violation, and may be fined repeatedly until its problems are resolved, said a cabinet official. Any agency that does not install devices to monitor noise levels or file its monitoring reports on a regular basis will also be fined up to NT\$100,000 but not less than NT\$20,000. An MRT company is responsible for monitoring noise levels inside its trains. Passengers who feel uncomfortable about the noise levels inside a train may file complaints. The company is obliged to introduce a plan detailing what it plans to do to reduce noise levels. The amendment will also provide a legal basis for government agencies to charge services related to noise control, such as monitoring noise levels and issuing noise pollution-free licenses to applicants who need them for various reasons.

More planes, more pain

Low-cost airline FlyBe has announced a string of new flights from Bristol International Airport to France and Spain. FlyBe will make Bristol one of its hub airports, with the launch of new no-frills routes to half a dozen European destinations. But the announcement was met with dismay by campaigners against noise and pollution at the airport. FlyBe said it would use its new quiet and environmentally friendly Bombardier Q400 aircraft for the new services, which include daily flights to Toulouse, Bordeaux and Bergerac in France and Murcia in Spain. But Marion Mainwaring, secretary of the Parish Councils Airports Association, said: "There is no such thing as a quiet plane. These new routes will only add to the noise problems here."