

Quietly persistent

The Quiet Communities Act of 2003 was introduced into the US Congress early that year and is now languishing in committee, in fact a number of committees with overlapping interests in noise and environment, to which it was referred. It is the sixth time this treatment has been given to a similar Bill through the 1990's and 2000's, killed off by the device of leaving to die in committee, until they ran out of time; a convenient way of freezing out a Bill without going on record as voting against it. We congratulate Congresswoman Nita Lowey (Democrat – NY) for her upbeat persistence in repeated tabling of the Bill.

Following the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 and the Noise Control Act of 1972, an Office of Noise Abatement and Control (ONAC) was set up. This lost its funding in 1982 in a cost-cutting Reagan initiative. No funds have been provided since. A cynic might point to other factors in the demise of ONAC. For example, it had been supported by national industries which wished to avoid control by local regulations. This aim was achieved, so they saw no further need for ONAC and did not support its continuation. ONAC also ran into difficulties in its controversial attempts to control noise from garbage collection, losing

credibility through this.

The EPA retains responsibility for enforcing regulations under the Noise Control Act of 1972, despite loss of funding. The latest Quiet Communities Act requires the EPA to re-establish ONAC with some very specific responsibilities for research, assessment, communication and education in noise control, and annual funding of \$21million. It also emphasises local and State activities as opposed to Federal control, all very laudable initiatives.

The Bill will probably die again, partly for reasons which lie within the Bill itself. It occasionally slips into emotive wording, such as "Excessive noise...can result in untold costs on society...". It also contains an explicit requirement that the newly formed ONAC shall carry out an early study of aviation noise, principally to reassess the methods of the Federal Aviation Administration. So the Bill may raise suspicions that it is an instrument of the aircraft noise control lobby, which will not endear it to many in Congress. Perhaps the Bill's promoters should remove this demand, recognising that the main need is to have ONAC active once more, without imposing an initial condition on how it should proceed to fulfil its wide responsibilities.

noise notes

TRAIN HORNS

At all hours of the night, residents of towns who live anywhere near railroad tracks are jolted from their sleep by the sound of blaring train horns. "When these trains come through during the sleeping hours of 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., their horn noise is heard to the point of awakening most people who are living at lateral distance of one mile and more to each side of the tracks," Antioch resident Bob Schieck said. "It is truly noise pollution beyond reason." A new federal ruling requires trains to sound their horns continually as they go through railroad crossings.

NEW HOPE IN NEW HOPE

Residents in New Hope, New Jersey, want to know about the motorcycles pouring into their river town on weekends, crowding the streets, taking over parking spots and polluting the air with their noise. Specifically they want to know, if the police are cracking down on riders who refuse to put mufflers on their bikes, why does the problem continue? People are upset enough they're putting the question to officials, Borough Council President Richard Hirschfield said during a meeting of council held Nov. 18. One man who addressed the council that night said he's putting his home up for sale and leaving because the noise is so bad on weekends he can't enjoy his property anymore. The answer is complicated, officials said. They agreed something needs to be done, in addition to the roadblocks already conducted and the tickets being given out by the Police Department. A remedy is on the way and most likely will be in place by next Spring. By then, the town will own a decibel meter. The device will allow the borough to better police those motorcyclists who refuse to put a muffler on their vehicles, according to Police Chief Rick Pasqualini. With such a meter on hand, the town will be able to base its monitoring of unmuffled bikes on the Pennsylvania Motor Vehicle Code, the chief said. The code offers specific guidelines based on decibels. Plus it provides for stiffer fines. "We're coming to a solution that's workable for all of us," he said. Officials already have plans to raise the amount of the fine. That change is on the agenda for February, according to Mr. Hirschfield. "Instead of \$50, maybe \$500," he said. "This council is zero tolerance." The council president took pains to point out the borough is not anti-motorcycle. Plus, the police chief himself enjoys owning a bike. "The issue is illegal motorcycles," Mr. Hirschfield said. Part of the problem, he added, is even though a biker is fined, he could return without having done anything to remedy the problem. "Literally we have hundreds of motorcycles on the weekends," Chief Pasqualini said, adding his department has "limited resources."

BLACKBURG PENALTIES RAISED

The Blacksburg Virginia Town Council unanimously decided at its October meeting that the penalty for a violation of the town's noise ordinance would be raised from a Class 4 misdemeanor to a Class 2 misdemeanor. The penalty for being too loud after 10 p.m. is now the same as the penalty for possession of certain types of drugs: a fine up to \$1,000 and/or up to six months in jail. The previous penalty for a noise violation was a fine up to \$250. The new policy was enacted because of the overwhelming number of complaints generated by parties the police have had to deal with so far this year, according to the Blacksburg Police Department.