

# Chapter 13. Noise Element

## 13.1 Purpose

This Element identifies the County’s approach to managing noise levels to minimize the exposure of community residents to excessive noise. The analysis follows the guidelines adopted by the Office of Noise Control of the California Department of Health Services.

## 13.2 Relationship to Other Elements

Noise levels are considered in the Land Use Element to avoid direct conflicts between neighboring uses and to establish patterns of land uses that minimize noise exposure. Policies in the Circulation Element related to road location, design, and non-motorized transportation can affect traffic noise levels. Policies of the Housing Element and Open Space Element also reflect noise considerations.

## 13.3 Background

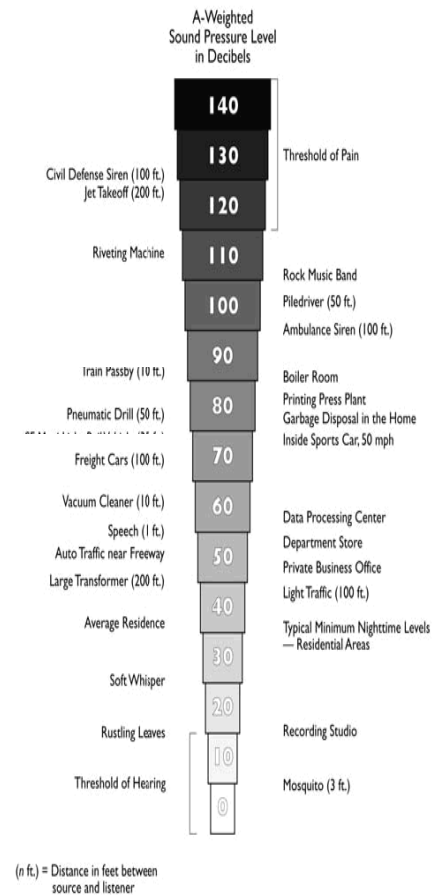
### Measuring and Characterizing Noise

Assessing the community noise environment involves measuring three aspects of sound: level, frequency, and variation. Sound level is the magnitude or loudness of a sound, expressed in decibels (see Figure 13-1 and the glossary). Frequency is a measure of the pitch of the sound, and variation is the change in noise exposure over time. When sound is disagreeable or unwanted, it is considered noise.

Most community noise is produced by many distant sources, which rise and fall gradually throughout the day creating a relatively steady background sound having no identifiable source. The Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) is a measure that describes average noise exposure over a period of time.

Because communities are more sensitive to impacts from nighttime noise, noise descriptors must specifically take this time period into account. Common measures include the CNEL and the Day-Night Average Level (Ldn). Both reflect noise exposure over an average day, with greater weight given to noise occurring during the evening and night. The two descriptors are roughly equivalent but CNEL is used in this Plan for regulating cumulative noise exposure over a 24-hour period.

**Figure 13.1: Sound Level Comparison Chart**



Noise levels of short duration, such as aircraft flyovers or concerts, are not well characterized by average noise level measurements yet are often the source of complaints. Maximum Noise Level (Lmax) is used in this Plan for the purposes of regulating short-term noise levels.

**Principal Noise Sources**

Table 13-A lists prominent noise sources within unincorporated areas of the county and Table 13-B provides the results of community noise surveys by ESA conducted in November 2016 for selected roadways in the incorporated, unincorporated, and rural areas of the County.

The Map Book Appendix contains noise level contours for state highways, selected county roads, county airports, and other prominent sources. Other noise sources not included in the inventory include noises from persons, pets and livestock, industrial equipment, and construction sites.

<b>Table 13-A. Inventory of Prominent Sources of Noise within Communities of Humboldt County</b>				
	<b>SOURCE OF NOISE</b>			
<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<b>ROADS</b>	<b>AIRPORTS</b>	<b>RAILROAD*</b>	<b>STATIONARY SOURCES</b>
ALTON	U.S. 101, State Highway 36	Rohnerville	Northwestern Pacific	NONE
ARCATA	U.S. 101, State Highways 299 & 255	NONE	Northwestern Pacific	NONE
BLOCKSBURG	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
BLUE LAKE	State Highway 299	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
BRIDGEVILLE	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
CAPETOWN	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
CARLOTTA	State Highway 36	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
DINSMORE	State Highway 36	Dinsmore Airport	NONE	NONE
DYERVILLE	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
EUREKA	U.S. 101, Myrtle Ave. Harris, Henderson & "H" St	Murray Field	Northwestern Pacific	Redwood Acres
FAIRHAVEN	New Navy Base Rd.	City of Eureka Airport	NONE	Racetrack
FERNDALE	State Highway 211	NONE	NONE	Fairgrounds, Gravel operations
FLDDBROOK	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE

COMMUNITY	SOURCE OF NOISE			
	ROADS	AIRPORTS	RAILROAD*	STATIONARY SOURCES
FIELDS LANDING	U.S. 101	NONE	Northwestern Pacific	Shipping operations
FORTUNA	U.S. 101, Main St.	Rohnerville Airport	Northwestern Pacific	Gravel operations
FRESHWATER	Freshwater Rd.	NONE	NONE	NONE
GARBERVILLE	U.S. 101	Airport	NONE	Gravel operations
HOOPA	State Highway 96	Former County Airport	NONE	Gravel operations
HYDESVILLE	State Highway 36, Rohnerville Rd.	Rohnerville	NONE	NONE
KNEELAND	NONE	Kneeland Airport	NONE	NONE
LOLETA	NONE	NONE	Northwestern Pacific	NONE
MANILA	State Highway 255 (New Navy Base Rd.)	NONE	NONE	NONE
MAPLE CREEK	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
MARTIN'S FERRY/ WEITCHPEC	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
McKINLEYVILLE	U.S. 101, Central Ave.	Eureka/Arcata Airport	NONE	Gun Club
MOONSTONE/ WESTHAVEN	U.S. 101	NONE	NONE	NONE
ORLEANS	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
ORICK	U.S. 101	NONE	NONE	NONE
PETROLIA	NONE	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations
REDWAY	Redwood Dr.	NONE	NONE	NONE
RIO DELL	U.S. 101, Wildwood Ave.	NONE	Northwestern Pacific	NONE
ROHNERVILLE (See Fortuna)				
SAMOA	New Navy Base Rd.	NONE	NONE	Pulp mill, cogeneration plant, shipping operations

**Table 13-A. Inventory of Prominent Sources of Noise within Communities of Humboldt County (Continued)**

COMMUNITY	SOURCE OF NOISE			
	ROADS	AIRPORTS	RAILROAD*	STATIONARY SOURCES
SCOTIA	U.S. 101	NONE	Northwestern Pacific	Mill, gravel operations
TRINIDAD	U.S. 101	NONE	NONE	NONE
SHELTER COVE	Shelter Cove Rd.	Shelter Cove	NONE	NONE
WEOTT	U.S. 101	NONE	NONE	NONE
WILLOW CREEK	State Highways 299 & 96	NONE	NONE	Gravel operations

\* Note: The former Northwestern Pacific Railroad is now under the direction of the North Coast Railroad Authority. While local rail lines have not operated on a regular basis for several years, future rail usage should continue to be considered in land use planning decisions, unless the railroad right-of-ways are abandoned.

**Traffic Noise**

Traffic noise depends primarily on the speed of traffic and the percentage of truck traffic. The primary source of noise from automobiles is high-frequency tire noise, which increases with vehicle speed. In addition, trucks and older automobiles produce engine and exhaust noise, and trucks generate wind noise.

As illustrated in Table 13-B, Humboldt County is primarily subject to noise impacts from U.S. Highway 101, which creates noise in areas up to 500 feet away. Differences in elevation can amplify or dampen noise levels; for example, noise from a thoroughfare in a trough or valley between residential areas will be reflected upward and focused while noise from an elevated thoroughfare may dissipate. On flat ground, a buffer, such as a sound wall or dense vegetation, will greatly reduce noise escaping to surrounding areas. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) sometimes installs sound walls along state roads when new construction or widening is proposed. In Humboldt County, Caltrans has not pursued sound wall construction along existing highways.

**Table 13-B. Traffic Noise Levels in Humboldt County, 2016**

Location	Route	Post Mile	Measured CNEL	Distance from Centerline (feet)	Distance to 65 CNEL (feet)	Distance to 60 CNEL (feet)
Benbow	US 101	9.1	73.4	86	312	673
North of Metropolitan Rd.	US 101	54.9	71.4	74	198	426
South of Loleta Dr.	US 101	65.6	75.1	56	264	569
North of Indianola Cutoff	US 101	82.8	75.6	112	570	1,228
North of Airport Rd.	US 101	94.2	69.6	106	215	463
South of Seawood Dr.	US 101	102.8	67.2	130	182	393
South of Bald Hills Rd.	US 101	122.0	68.0	58	92	198
South of Corbett Ranch Ln.	SR 36	7.7	68.1	27	43	94
East of Blue Lake Blvd.	SR 299	8.5	65.7	64	71	154
West of Will Rd.	SR 299	37.8	69.4	56	110	237
South of Orchard Park Ln.	SR 96	2.1	65.2	38	39	84
South of Owl Mine Rd.	SR 96	35.8	63.1	31	23	50

**Source: ESA, 2016**

Noise surveys were conducted at various locations along US 101, State Route (SR) 299, SR 96 and SR 36 over a 24-hour period in November 14 through November 18, 2016. Monitoring sites included incorporated, unincorporated, and rural areas of the County. Distances to the 60 dBA CNEL contour ranged from 50 feet south of Owl Mine Road along SR 96 near Orleans to 1,228 feet north of Indianola Cutoff along Highway 101 near Brainard.

**Airport Noise**

Airport noise caused by aircraft depends on the type of aircraft and the frequency and direction of flights. Noise from aircraft warming up early in the morning can also be a significant source of noise from airports. Diagrams showing existing and projected noise levels associated with airport noise are contained in the County’s Airport Land Use Compatibility Plans. The most current diagrams are shown in the Map Book Appendix.

### Noise Compatibility

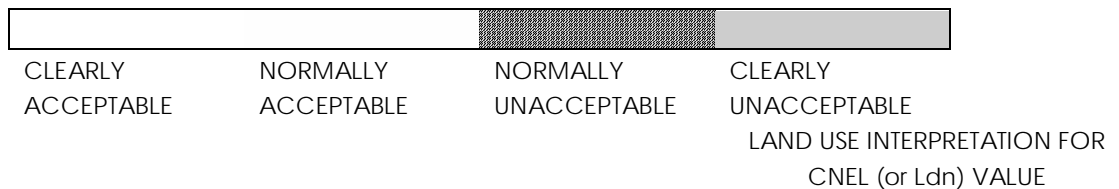
Evaluating new development projects for noise impacts should be based on a comparison of the noise compatibility standards in Table 13-C with noise contours and other available information. Fences, landscaping, and noise insulation can be used to mitigate the hazards of excessive noise levels.

A standard construction wood frame house reduces noise transmission by 15dBA. Since interior noise levels for residences are not to exceed 45dBA, the maximum exterior noise level for residences is 60dBA without requiring additional insulation. In areas where CNEL noise levels exceed 60dBA, the need for additional noise insulation will vary depending on the land use designation; adjacent uses; distance-to-noise source; and intervening topography, vegetation, and other buffers. The building code provides standards for meeting noise insulation requirements.

Appropriate standards for short-term noise levels measured by Lmax varies with the type of land use and time of day. Acceptable daytime levels in industrial and commercial areas are typically based on a combination of health and nuisance considerations and typically do not exceed 85 dBA. In residential areas, standards are typically set to avoid the perception of nuisance, such as noise levels that block normal conversation. Noise level above 66 dBA requires raised voices to be heard at a distance of three feet. Indoor noise levels between 50 and 60 dBA can disturb sleep.

The perception of nuisance will vary based upon sound level, frequency, and fluctuation. It also depends upon the character of the sound, number of noise events, familiarity and predictability, and the attitude of the listener. CNEL and Lmax are typically the basis for making nuisance determinations but other factors may be considered. For example, an annual high school parade may exceed residential noise levels but might not be deemed a nuisance.

**Table 13-C Land Use / Noise Compatibility Standards**



LAND USE CATEGORY	Maximum Interior Noise Levels*	50 – 60	61 - 70	71 - 80	81 - 90	91+
Residential Single Family, Duplex, Mobile Homes	45					
Residential Multiple Family, Dormitories, etc.	45					
Transient Lodging	45					
School Classrooms, Libraries, Churches	45					
Hospitals, Nursing Homes	45					
Auditoriums, Concert Halls, Music Shells	35					
Sports Arenas, Outdoor Spectator Sports						
Playgrounds, Neighborhood Parks						
Golf Courses, Riding Stables, Water Rec., Cemeteries						

LAND USE CATEGORY	Maximum Interior Noise Levels*	50 – 60	61 - 70	71 - 80	81 - 90	91+
Office Buildings, Personal, Business & Professional	50					
Commercial: Retail, Movie Theaters, Restaurants	50					
Commercial: Wholesale, Some Retail, Ind., Mfg., Util.						
Manufacturing, Communications(Noise Sensitive)						
Livestock Farming, Animal Breeding						
Agriculture (except Livestock), Mining, Fishing						
Public Right-of-Way						
Extensive Natural Recreation Areas						

\*Due to exterior sources

(Source: Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, Inc., 1974)

**CLEARLY ACCEPTABLE:** The noise exposure is such that the activities associated with the land use may be carried out with essentially no interference. (Residential areas: both indoor and outdoor noise environments are pleasant.)

**NORMALLY ACCEPTABLE:** The noise exposure is great enough to be of some concern, but common constructions will make the indoor environment acceptable, even for sleeping quarters. (Residential areas: the outdoor environment will be reasonably pleasant for recreation and play at the quiet end and will be tolerable at the noisy end.)

**NORMALLY UNACCEPTABLE:** The noise exposure is significantly more severe so that unusual and costly building constructions are necessary to ensure adequate performance of activities. (Residential areas: barriers must be erected between the site and prominent noise sources to make the outdoor environment tolerable.)

**CLEARLY UNACCEPTABLE:** The noise exposure at the site is so severe that construction costs to make the indoor environment acceptable for performance of activities would be prohibitive. (Residential areas: the outdoor environment would be intolerable for normal residential use.)

## 13.4 Goals and Policies

### Goals

- N-G1. Excessive Noise.** A quiet and healthful environment with limited disagreeable noise.
- N-G2. Incompatible Land Uses.** Land uses arranged to reduce annoyance and complaints and minimize the exposure of community residents to excessive noise.

### Policies

- N-P1. Minimize Noise from Stationary and Mobile Sources.** Minimize stationary noise sources and noise emanating from temporary activities by applying appropriate standards for average and short-term noise levels during permit review and subsequent monitoring.

- N-P2. Guide to Land Use Planning.** Evaluate current noise levels and mitigate projected noise levels when making community planning and zoning decisions to minimize the exposure of community residents to nuisance noise levels. Minimize vehicular and aircraft noise exposure by planning land uses compatible with transportation corridors and airports, and applying noise attenuation designs and construction standards. Avoid zoning patterns that permit people to “move to the nuisance” unless mitigated through project conditions or recorded notice.
- N-P3. Noise from U.S. Highway 101 (U.S. 101) and State Highway 299.** The County shall support efforts to reduce noise levels on U.S. 101 and State Highway 299 along sections in proximity to concentrated residential development through prioritized roadway surface maintenance, use of noise-reducing surface treatments, traffic-safe tree or shrub plantings, or, in cases of significant noise exposure, use of lower speed limits and construction of sound walls.
- N-P4. Protection from Excessive Noise.** Protect persons from existing or future excessive levels of noise which interfere with sleep, communication, relaxation, health or legally permitted use of property.

## 13.5 Standards

- N-S1. Land Use/Noise Compatibility Matrix.** The Land Use/Noise Compatibility Standards (Table 13-C) shall be used as a guide to ensure compatibility of land uses. Development may occur in areas identified as “normally unacceptable” if mitigation measures can reduce indoor noise levels to “Maximum Interior Noise Levels” and outdoor noise levels to the maximum “Normally Acceptable” value for the given Land Use Category.
- N-S2. Noise Impact Combining Zones.** The 20-year projected noise contours in the Map Book Appendix and the most current Airport Land Use Compatibility Plans shall be used to identify noise impact combining zone areas to indicate where special sound insulation measures may apply.
- N-S3. Environmental Review Process.** For noise sensitive locations where noise contours do not exist, the environmental review process required by the California Environmental Quality Act shall be utilized to generate the required analysis and determine the appropriate mitigation per Plan and state standards. Future noise levels shall be predicted for a period of at least 10 years from the time of building permit application.



- N-S4. Noise Study Requirements.** When a discretionary project has the potential to generate noise levels in excess of Plan standards, a noise study together with acceptable plans to assure compliance with the standards shall be required. The noise study shall measure or model as appropriate, Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) and Maximum Noise Level (Lmax) levels at property lines and, if feasible, receptor locations. Noise studies shall be prepared by qualified individuals using calibrated equipment under currently accepted professional standards and include an analysis of the characteristics of the project in relation to noise levels, all feasible mitigations, and projected noise impacts. *The Noise Guidebook* published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or its equivalent, shall be used to guide analysis and mitigation recommendations.
  
- N-S5. Noise Standards for Habitable Rooms.** Noise reduction shall be required as necessary in new development to achieve a maximum of 45 CNEL (Community Noise Equivalent Level) interior noise levels in all habitable rooms per California building standards.
  
- N-S6. Noise Reduction Requirements for Exterior Areas in Residential Zones.** Newly created single family residential lots of 5,000 square feet or more, should contain a usable outdoor area at least 200 square feet in size per dwelling unit that meets the 60 CNEL (Community Noise Equivalent Level) standard.
  
- N-S7. Short-term Noise Performance Standards (Lmax).** The following noise standards, unless otherwise specifically indicated, shall apply to all property within their assigned noise zones and such standards shall constitute the maximum permissible noise level within the respective zones.

<b>SHORT-TERM NOISE STANDARDS (Lmax)</b>		
<b>Zoning Classification</b>	<b>Day (maximum)</b>	<b>Night (maximum)</b>
	<b>6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. dBA</b>	<b>10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. dBA</b>
MG, MC, AE, TPZ,TC, AG, FP, FR, MH	80	70
CN, MB, ML, RRA, CG, CR C-1, C-2, C-3,	75	65
RM, R-3, R-4	65	60
RS, R-1, R-2, NR	65	60

Exceptions. The Short Term Noise levels shown in the above table shall not apply to uses such as, but not limited to:

1. Portable generator use in areas served by public electricity when electrical service is interrupted during emergencies as determined by the Planning Director.
2. Temporary events in conformance with an approved Conditional Use Permit.
3. Use of chainsaws for cutting firewood and power equipment used for landscape maintenance when accessory to permitted on-site uses.

4. Heavy equipment and power tools used during construction of permitted structures when conforming to the terms of the approved permit.
5. Emergency vehicles.

Protocol for measuring exceedances:

1. Calibrate and establish reference for sound meter:  
Decibel measurement made shall be based on a reference sound pressure of 0.0002 microbars as measured with a sound level meter using the "A" weighted network.
2. Determine ambient background noise levels:  
Ambient noise without the noise source in operation shall be observed at 15 second intervals for a period of 15 minutes, measured along the property line in a direct line between the noise source and the nearest receptor. The lowest reading is interpreted as the ambient noise level of that sampling point. If this reading is above the standard set for the noise zone, steps must be taken to determine the source or sources of the intruding high-level noise followed by appropriate control action before continuing the survey. If the reading is equal to or below the standard, the survey can proceed.
3. Measure for exceedances:  
With the noise source in operation, record the instantaneous response at 15 second intervals for a 15 minute period. Or, for a noise source of less than 15 minutes, record the instantaneous response at 15 second intervals for the time the noise source is in operation. The lowest response level recorded while the noise source is in operation is interpreted as the intruding noise level. Compare the intruding noise levels with the standard. If the noise level generated from the noise source exceeds the standard, the noise source is generating noise levels in excess of the allowable standards set for the noise zone.

## 13.6 Implementation Measures

- N-IM1. Noise Impact Combining Zone.** Utilize Noise Impact Combining Zone designations to identify areas where noise impact mitigations are required.
- N-IM2. Periodic Review of Combining Zones.** Periodically identify and evaluate potential noise problem areas for mitigation or as candidates for noise impact combining zones, particularly during Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan updates.
- N-IM3. Compliance Program.** The County shall investigate complaints of excessive noise and control noise sources consistent with the standards established by the Plan. Nuisance determinations shall be based on noise levels, duration, and number of noise events.

- N-IM4. Noise from U.S. Highway 101 (U.S. 101) and State Highway 299.** Working through its representation on Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG), the County shall work with other affected jurisdictions and request California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to consider implementing noise reduction measures on U.S. 101 and State Highway 299 along sections in proximity to concentrated residential development.
- N-IM5. Adoption of Performance Standards.** Adopt Industrial Performance Standards Countywide.
- N-IM6. Noise Control Ordinance.** Prepare and consider a noise control ordinance to regulate noise and vibration sources in order to protect persons from existing or future excessive levels of noise and/or vibration which interfere with sleep, communication, relaxation, health or legally permitted use of property. The ordinance shall define excessive levels of noise for construction activities to be incorporated as permit requirements and other noise sources and may exempt or modify noise requirements for agricultural uses, school functions, property maintenance, waste collection and other sources. The ordinance shall include responsibilities and procedures for enforcement, abatement and variances.
- N-IM7. Highways Noise Contours.** Request Caltrans to update current and projected noise contours for highways.
- N-IM8. Airport Noise Contours.** Incorporate into the Noise Impact Maps in Appendix F the new noise contour data for airports and surrounding areas from Airport Master Plans, and from new ALUPs within six months of adoption of a new ALUP.
- N-IM9. Garberville Airport Noise Impact Combining Zone.** Add a Noise Impact (N) Combining Zone to the areas surrounding the Garberville Airport that are subject to noise levels equal to or above 60 CNEL according to Figure 5B of the 2007 Garberville Airport Master Plan Report, or the most recent Garberville Airport Master Plan Report.

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