



# NOISE LETTER

The Newsletter of the Right to Quiet Society  
for Soundscape Awareness and Protection

---

4342 13<sup>th</sup> Ave W, Vancouver, BC V6R 2T9, Canada | [www.quiet.org](http://www.quiet.org) | 672-514-6753 | Winter 2022-23  
Charitable Registration BN: 11915 4680 RR 0001

## Right to Quiet Celebrates



To celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> year as a registered non-profit based in British Columbia, Right to Quiet undertook three public awareness initiatives, as announced in the Spring 2022 *NOISELetter*.

The City of Vancouver's Transit Shelter Advertising Program ran

our poster in 12 bus shelters for four weeks prior to International Noise Awareness Day in April. We're planning another campaign for the 2023 INAD.

Donating 40 books to BC libraries seemed like a good idea, but contrary to our experience in previous years, many of the 70 libraries declined to accept our offer for a variety of reasons. As of December 1 we had delivered 30 new books, including 19 to the Vancouver Public Library and a few to small libraries such as

Beaver Valley, Fernie and Sparwood. Ideas for distributing the remaining books are welcome at [info@quiet.org](mailto:info@quiet.org) or 672-514-6753.

On the April 27 International Noise Awareness Day, our Quiet Parks and Quiet Spaces brought authorities from Sweden, London, New York City and Surrey, BC together for a virtual panel discussion ably moderated by former Vancouver Parks Board Commissioner Catherine Evans. A recording is available on our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyHxoUVISRY>). Although it attracted fewer politicians than we had hoped, there was ample participation by municipal civil servants from Lower Mainland British Columbia. We hope they will influence public policy in their jurisdictions with better protection of quiet in parks and public spaces.

These projects resulted from the work of a few volunteers. As our message spreads, we expect it will attract both new members and more volunteers.

## War affects soundscapes far beyond Ukraine

Hans Schmid, former president of Right to Quiet has found an interesting news item from Germany, which faces a difficult winter since Vladimir Putin ended their usual natural gas supply from Russia. According to a report from NDR (*Norddeutscher Rundfunk*), the federal government has lowered restrictions on noise and shadows emanating from wind farms in the interest of maintaining energy security during the winter months; this exception to the longstanding restrictions will remain in effect until mid-April 2023. Specifically, the maximum noise a wind-powered generator is normally allowed to produce between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. will now be allowed to increase by up to four decibels. The shadow-casting restriction has been completely lifted. Operators of each wind farm must

apply to their state's authority for permission to increase the noise level of their turbines, and applications for hundreds of turbines have already been filed.

Opponents of wind farms are naturally disconcerted by this development. However, operators point out that they did not ask for these relaxed standards. As one operator put it, "It was a cry for help from the politicians." Furthermore, they say their increased revenues are expected to barely cover costs of the technical modifications required for the turbines. The changes are projected to achieve an overall increased energy output of about one percent.

---

NO COMMENT: *"It's no accident that the words "silent" and "listen" are spelled with the same letters."* Terry O'Reilly, Under the Influence, CBC, March 25, 2021

---



## David Sadoway joins Board of Directors

Right to Quiet is pleased that David Sadoway has been elected as Director at Large at our virtual Annual General Meeting on December 6. David is a faculty member in the Geography and Environment Department of Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) in Surrey, BC. As an urban planner and environmental manager, he has lived and worked in Asia for over 15 years teaching and researching soundscapes and noise impacts on urban quality of life and livability. “Provisioning access to quiet places for all with low air and light pollution are not only crucial for biodiversity protection, but also for socio-psychological health.”

At the 2022 INAD event, Quiet Parks and Quiet Spaces, David provided interesting perspective from his experience abroad; he also contributed to the panel discussion on noise cameras at the AGM. We look forward to a constructive relationship with David and his KPU students.

## Educating People to the Dangers of Noise Pollution through Fiction

*Arline L. Bronzaft, Professor Emerita, City University of New York*

Noise pollution has been a problem for many years as Annette Zaner points out in the first chapter of “Noise and Health” (1991). She writes about noisy delivery wagons on the cobble streets of ancient Rome and Old Testament stories of loud music. Dr. Zaner goes on to describe the noises that came along with more modern technology, e.g. rail, road and air transportation, industrial machinery noise, emergency signal sounds, etc.

Today, there has also been a growth in the awareness of noise pollution and, as a result, the formation of numerous organizations worldwide to combat noise and support the growth of quiet places. The Right to Quiet is one such organization as are Quiet Communities Inc. and Quiet Parks International. Supporting the growth of these organizations has been the increased number of academic studies that have linked noise to adverse mental and physical health effects and quiet to sounder health. Yet, the policies needed to lessen noise pollution have not kept up with the research that has certainly linked noise pollution to deleterious health effects.

<https://www.scirp.org/journal/PaperInformation.aspx?PaperID=76120>

Generally, people are introduced to the adverse effects of noise through academic books and writings, but recently two fictional books have arrived with noise impacts at the center of their stories, namely, John Stewart’s “The Organisation leaves no traces” (2021) and Alan Tongret’s “Revolt of the Moles” (2022). John Stewart, a leading anti-noise campaigner in London, who is the lead author of the book “Why Noise Matters” has now turned to fiction to speak out against noise. His book entitled “The Organization leaves no traces” consists of six short crime stories with noise prominently featured. Alan Tongret, a novelist and playwright, having experienced an intrusive noisy neighbor, has written “Revolt of the Moles” that deals with unwanted and disturbing noises in a neighborhood. I know that John Stewart has written his book to advance his anti-noise activities and after several conversations with Alan Tongret, I believe he will speak out more against the harmful effects of noise as he promotes his book.

It is hoped that these two works of fiction will serve to attract people to the noise issue and to encourage them to join in the battle to reduce noise pollution.

1) Zaner, Annette. (1991). Definitions and Sources of Noise. In: Fay, Thomas A., *Noise & Health*, The New York Academy of Medicine.

2) Stewart, John. (2021). *The Organization leaves no traces*. London: Europe Books.

3) Tongret, Alan. (2022). *Revolt of the Moles*. U.S.A.: Alan Charles Tongret.

# Struggling for Quiet in Puerto Rico

Emanuel Silva Cotto ([e.silva.c95@gmail.com](mailto:e.silva.c95@gmail.com))

Big Pharma is currently one of the most lucrative businesses in the health care sector, bringing in billions of dollars in annual profits. Sadly, all this production and profit comes at a cost, and as it's typically done, this cost is passed on to the consumer. Ironically, the cost is not only monetary; it is a disruption of well-being and quality of life in the adjacent communities due to the noise pollution these factories emit.

A great example of this is the McNeil Las Piedras division of Johnson & Johnson located in Las Piedras, Puerto Rico. Noise emissions from this facility have been polluting the area around its perimeter, as much as one-half mile away. The facility has been incorporating major upgrades to its operation without considering the communities in its surroundings; the last update completed in September 2021 caused a major increase in noise pollution, forcing several communities to live under this annoyance 24/7, which has triggered many recent noise complaints.

To deal with this disruption, our community has been contacting the facility to express our concerns. However, nothing has been done and the annoyance hasn't decreased. The response the company provides is that they are doing assessments of their equipment and irrelevant "background sources" in what looks like an attempt to blame the sounds on inoffensive sources. It is worth mentioning that other factories operating on the island (Amgen, Janssen, etc.) operate even closer to several communities with completely acceptable levels of noise, unlike McNeil which produces disturbance up to one-half mile away.

McNeil Las Piedras has been the focus of several controversies in the past, including the violation of federal laws on the production and quality control of numerous medications that triggered recalls. Several injuries and one death were caused by the explosion of a 4,000-volt transformer in the facility.



Now, the company is actively damaging the environment, lowering property values and quality of life for hundreds of Puerto Ricans, while cynically trying to blame the damage from its actions on irrelevant and inoffensive sources. We've also been expressing our discomfort emanating from the facility location on Google Maps, but our reviews have already been removed by the company. Ironically, we must live with the unbearable sound 24/7, but as soon as we express our annoyance we are silenced.

Despite sporadic and contradictory company communications about alleged technical modifications, and except for one quiet week in early December, loud noise continues to affect residences up to 700 m from the plant for 24 hours per day. Calls from residents are regularly blocked by the company, further aggravating their anxiety.

Considering the billions in revenue this factory produces and all the incentives Puerto Rico hands to this corporation, it is only reasonable that the company should respect and value the well-being and quality of life of all Puerto Ricans. However, it has been demonstrated that this is not the case. Production and cost effectiveness are the main goals of such inhumane corporations, even when gained at the cost of human suffering and environmental exploitation.

## Not Serendipity

Karl Raab

Staying alert for the word "quiet" anywhere, I find all manner of information, including book titles containing that word. Some have little or nothing to do with the goals of Right to Quiet. But, aside from technical reviews and discussions, I occasionally find something unusual. CBC Radio's The Current ran an interview on December 7 with Diane Borsato, author of *Mushrooming: The Joy of the Quiet Hunt*. She calls it "... a kind of practice of stillness that we don't have in a lot of other spheres in our life, and really rewarding that way." The pace is calm as well: "You're not running through the woods. You're walking really slowly and attentively." <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/mushrooming-diane-borsato-q-a-1.6619287>

# New York City Expands its Sound & Noise Education Module

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection has a comprehensive education program, and a few years ago DEP created an innovative program for students, the Sound & Noise Education Module. Just as the Covid pandemic began, an in-person event for educators and other interested parties had to be called off. We hope the Sound & Noise program will plan future in-person events for educators, and for the general public.

But there is great news — the Sound & Noise program has revitalized its resources, updating existing offerings and adding new lessons and worksheets. Topics include case studies, a guide to the city's noise code, noise activism, effects of sound and noise on animals, and much more. The program embraces a neutral, scientific, non-judgmental approach to its teachings. Right to Quiet has supported this program since its inception, and reminds readers that educators do not have to live in New

York City to implement the program. Educators from around the world can adapt the program to their localities and introduce students to a fascinating interdisciplinary topic.

Visit the official Sound & Noise Education Module website

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/dep/environment/sound-noise-education-module.page>

Read an article written by Right to Quiet board member Arline Bronzaft. Dr. Bronzaft serves as an advisor to NYC DEP, and has always championed sound and noise education for children.

<https://quietcommunities.org/nyc-educates-kids-about-the-dangers-of-noise>

## AGM Reviews Noise Camera Technology

The Right to Quiet Annual General Meeting took place virtually on December 6, 2022 with directors, members, and guests participating. Directors and members reelected four directors and elected a new director at large. The meeting program *Noise Cameras: Panacea or Pipe Dream?* featured three directors presenting different aspects of technology that is being piloted throughout the world. The universal experience of inadequate enforcement of vehicle noise regulations makes the prospect of automated ticketing appealing — but speakers agreed that noise cameras will not solve every problem, and solutions need to be holistic and synergistic. More information and a link to the meeting video can be found at <https://quiet.org/news-and-events>.

## New Approaches in the Search for Quieter Restaurants

Right to Quiet has created a new restaurant comment card along with a web page with articles and resources about restaurant sound levels. The page is intended for restaurant owners and managers who want to improve sound quality in their establishments, and for anyone seeking quieter restaurants. The cards can be copied or downloaded and used to create sheets of business cards. Visit our Quiet Dining page at <https://quiet.org/quiet-dining>.

Right to Quiet began creating comment cards in the early 1990s to distribute to restaurant management to either compliment or criticize the customer experience based on sound levels. Similar cards were used by Noise Watch in Toronto and Pipedown campaigns in several countries. Our new card is friendlier than its immediate predecessor, and includes more than a threat to stop being a customer — it includes a link that leads to resources.

Online reviews changed the power dynamic of customer complaints about businesses, and in the sphere of bars and restaurants, the smartphone app SoundPrint put more power into the hands of customers and workers. In cities throughout the world, it is possible to consult SoundPrint data and find venues quiet enough to comfortably converse with companions.

Read more about SoundPrint on our Quiet Dining page, and learn how to benefit from its data and contribute to its database.

You will also find information about WorkSafeBC, an occupational health agency in British Columbia that provides a way for employees to report loud sound levels in workplaces. Customers can also report loud restaurants and bars in British Columbia to WorkSafeBC, and all reporting is anonymous.

We are interested in the idea of automated sound level monitoring inside restaurants that results in current and recent readings that can be found online and posted at entryways. With this kind of technology, customers would have more control over the experience.

***It was much too loud in here!***

*High sound levels in restaurants make conversation difficult, and it's the number one reason customers eventually don't return.*



***There's more you can do!***

Visit <https://quiet.org/quiet-dining> for news and information about restaurant acoustics.