

“Promoting the protection of community livability through effective noise control”

Executive Summary

The Washington County Noise Control Task Force, under the auspices of the Washington County CCI, and in response to resident concerns, was established in 2003 to qualitatively assess: noise pollution in the county, the available regulatory means for controlling that pollution, the governmental agencies involved in administering those means and the current effectiveness of the resulting effort in reducing noise.

Noise pollution is a significant, growing and costly problem in Washington County. Today, noise engulfs our daily lives whether it is truck exhaust brakes, barking dogs, helicopter training, amplified car exhausts or some combination of those sources. At the same time, Washington County supports continued industrial and residential growth, and increased density, which fosters exponential growth in noise pollution. Further, significant research shows that noise attacks our mental and physical health, hampers learning in school children and diminishes property values and degrades other quality of life components. Since Washington County government asserts that protecting livability and promoting quality of life are primary principles and goals, it is clear that reducing noise pollution is of key importance to the county.

We assessed Washington County’s existing management of noise. We found it leaderless, disconnected, lacking any sense of priority, absent any central coordination, lacking in public-private partnerships, and lacking any prevention strategy. We did not perceive any balancing between the growth, the related increase in noise, and any resulting protection strategy. Until we began our study, only part of the system was maintaining complaint data. We inquired about the county’s value system and livability protection. We heard that livability protection values were not evidenced in daily work experience nor were they being communicated down the chain of command.

A basic foundation for effective noise management in Washington County can be established through a combination of an increased public awareness of the effects of noise pollution, a strong regulatory framework to provide tools for noise control and the use of available technology for collecting and evaluating noise pollution. In addition and because noise knows no jurisdictional boundaries, collaborative multiagency work will be necessary. Indeed, noise is a required element of planning that the State of Oregon requires counties make. Noise is a health, safety, and nuisance issue that requires government as a primary player. Citizens can learn to be noise responsible, good neighbors can mediate and businesses can respect our “commons”. Government, however, has a monopoly on its noise ordinance, government has a monopoly on enforcement of its ordinances, and government has a social duty to protect its citizens from known health and safety risks.