

Trojan - keeping the peace in Wakefield

When it comes to keeping the peace, noise nuisance is an issue where a simple dispute can often escalate quickly and without warning.

If left unresolved, prolonged noise nuisance can blight the lives of those living with it, affecting their health and mental wellbeing, so much so that people consider moving house as a result.

Fortunately Local Authorities and Housing Associations have long taken the issue seriously with dedicated teams employing the latest techniques and technology, to ensure a comprehensive investigation and a fair outcome. At Wakefield Metropolitan District Council Jill Edmondson is Team Leader in the Communities Environmental Health Department and has special responsibility for noise nuisance. Her team of Officers cover an area that encompasses a city centre, several towns, urban housing, industrial zones and rural settings - each bringing with it their own unique issues when it comes to noise nuisance.

There are also plenty of misunderstandings when it comes to the public perception of what constitutes noise nuisance, rather than just an annoyance. What one person finds unbearable may have little or no effect on someone else.

Technology has a huge part to play

Investigating officers have to tread a fine line on every complaint, weighing up the situation impartially/independently and decisively, taking action as and when they feel it is



required. However, with only 7 officers to cover Wakefield's 330sq km district, technology has a huge part to play when it comes to documenting or dis-proving a noise nuisance complaint. Jill's team currently use five Cirrus Research Trojan Noise Nuisance Recorders as part of their evidence-gathering.

"The recordings are invaluable when an officer has to approach the subject of the complaint and if necessary show them the evidence of noise nuisance," says Jill. "And whilst it is our duty to investigate whether noise nuisance is taking place, the results are not always what we or the complainant expect."

At a recent training seminar hosted by Cirrus Research, delegates were keen to share some of the more unusual cases they had dealt with, where not all was as it seemed. For example, some Officers discovered that the complainant had been deliberately antagonising/goading his neighbour's dog to capture the barking on a Trojan to justify his noise complaint.

Another officer dealt with a man who had recorded and was playing background tapes of barking to try and persuade a Council to take

action. His colleague had another case where a man had been deliberately setting off car alarms to make his case seem stronger. Since January 2013 Jill's team has booked out the Trojans on 234 separate occasions, usually for 5 days at a time. The same year Wakefield Council dealt with 1400 complaints of loud music, 150 of car or house alarms going off, 110 of noise from pubs or clubs and 120 of dogs barking.

Peace of mind

The Trojan is designed to be mains powered with secure cables, but it will switch to its own internal batteries if the mains power is lost. Another important feature is that, when power is restored, the Trojan will automatically restart even if its internal batteries are spent. This allows continuity and gives officers peace of mind that they are recording everything over a set period of time.

“ The Trojan is particularly invaluable when the noise nuisance is sporadic. ”



“The vast majority of cases can be dealt with through advice and the complainant speaking to their neighbour,” said Jill. “For those who have already tried this approach with no change in behaviour, we will then look to visit both parties and, where appropriate, a device is generally left for up to a week. If proof is recorded then a notice would be served. In extreme cases the officer can seize electrical and sound equipment or the defendants can find themselves in court with further fines, costs and even ASBOs served on them”.

The Trojan has recently being upgraded by Cirrus Research with new features to help make the lives easier for Jill’s team and others like them across the country.

The new Trojan² offers a high quality, high resolution audio recording using a 16bit/16kHz uncompressed WAV file. This gives plenty of frequency range (up to 8kHz) and a wide dynamic range (up to 96dB) so audio recordings can handle both high and low levels with no loss of quality.

Another key feature is the Wireless remote control and 4GB memory - usually more than enough for most noise nuisance applications but it can be expanded with a 32GB option. The AuditStore function in the Trojan² also guarantees the chain of data from the instrument to the software, a useful feature if you need to present measurements and recordings as evidence.

Other noise monitoring extras that have been included as standard include Pre & Post Trigger options for audio recording that can be set as needed. The pre-trigger can be up to 30 seconds and post-trigger up to 60 seconds, particularly useful for catching out falsified recordings.

All the software provided is licence-free with NoiseTools supplied as standard, free of charge and without any installation or licensing restrictions. This means customers can install it on as many desktops, laptops or servers as necessary at no extra cost. Updates are also free of charge.

“Useful for catching out falsified recordings”

“The Trojan is particularly invaluable when the noise nuisance is sporadic,” concludes Jill. “It gives us a very clear picture of what is going on. The equipment users like the remote control and being able to switch on the recorder from most rooms in the house whenever the noise starts. We find our Trojan recorders are in constant use all year round.”

What are the main types of noise that the Council deals with?

The types of noise, which people frequently complain about, can be divided into three distinct types:

Domestic Noise: This includes loud music, barking dogs, burglar alarms and late-night parties.

Commercial Noise: This includes factory noise, fan noise, chiller noise, delivery noise, construction site noise and music from pubs and clubs.

Noise in Streets: This includes car alarms, ice cream chimes, machinery operating in the road and the use of loudspeakers - but excludes traffic.

Councils have powers to deal with all of the above noise complaints. There are some additional noise controls that can help to stop or reduce noise from particular sources e.g. loudspeakers in the street, construction sites and night-time noise.

By far the greatest number of complaints received relate to barking dogs. This can be incessant or one off episodes, which can be hard to pinpoint without having a noise enforcement officer on site for a considerable length of time.

Noise complaints from crowing cockerels are also on the increase.

About Cirrus Research

Founded in 1970, Cirrus Research plc is a leading specialist in the development and production of noise measurement instruments. Its latest scientific and technological developments are utilised to produce noise measurement instrumentation equipment to accurately measure noise and its impact.

Cirrus Products used in this case study

- Trojan Noise Nuisance Recorder
- NoiseTools software

(Free with the Trojan Noise Nuisance recorder)

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