

WMA STATEMENT ON NOISE POLLUTION

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PREAMBLE

Given growing environmental awareness and knowledge of the impact of noise on health, the psyche, performance and well-being, the fight against environmental noise is becoming increasingly important. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes noise as the principal environmental nuisance in industrial nations.

Noise affects people in various ways. Its effects relate to hearing, the vegetative nervous system, the psyche, spoken communication, sleep and performance. Since noise acts as a stressor, an increased burden on the body leads to higher energy consumption and greater wear. It is thus suspected that noise can primarily favour diseases in which stress plays a contributory role, such as cardiovascular diseases, which can then be manifested in the form of hypertension, myocardial infarction, angina pectoris, or even apoplexy.

The effects in the psychosocial field are likewise dramatic. The stress caused by environmental noise - particularly road traffic noise - is a central concern, not only in the industrial nations, but increasingly also in the developing countries.

Owing to the continuous and massive growth of traffic volumes, both on the roads and in the air, the stress caused by environmental noise has increased steadily in terms of both its duration and the area affected.

Damage to hearing caused by leisure-time noise is also of growing concern. The most common source of noise in this context is music, to which the ear is exposed by different audio media at different places (portable music players, stereo systems, discotheques, con-certs). The risk of suffering hearing damage is underestimated by most people, or even consciously denied. The greatest issue (or aspect) lies in creating awareness of the problem in the high-risk group - which generally means young people. In this respect, the legislature is called upon to intervene and reduce the potential for damage by introducing sound level limiters in audio playback units and maximum permissible sound levels at music events, or by banning children's toys that are excessively loud or produce excessive noise levels.

In keeping with its socio-medical commitment, the World Medical Association is issuing a statement on the problem of noise pollution with the aim of making a contribution to the fight against environmental noise through more extensive information and more acute awareness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The World Medical Association calls upon the National Medical Associations to:

1. Inform the public, especially persons affected by environmental noise, as well as poli-cy and decision makers, of the dangers of noise pollution.
2. Call upon ministers of transport and urban planners to develop alternative concepts that are capable of countering the growing level of environmental noise pollution.
3. Advocate appropriate statutory regulations for combating environmental noise pollution.
4. Support enforcement of noise pollution legislation and monitor the effectiveness of control measures.
5. Inform young people of the risks associated with listening to excessively loud music, such as that which emanates, for example, from portable music players, use of stereo systems with earphones, audio systems in cars, and attendance at rock concerts and discotheques.
6. Prompt the educational authorities to inform pupils at an early stage regarding the effects of noise on people, how stress due to environmental noise can be counteracted, the role of the individual in contributing to noise pollution, and the risks associated with listening to excessively loud music.
7. Provide information about risks of damage to hearing that arise in the private sector as a result of working with power tools or operating excessively loud motor vehicles.
8. Emphasize to those individuals who are exposed to excessive levels of noise in the workplace the importance of protecting themselves against irreducible noise.
9. Call upon the persons responsible for occupational safety and health in businesses to take further action to reduce noise emission, in order to ensure protection of the health of employees at the workplace.