NOISE FUNDAMENTALS

Noise

Hearing is a fundamental human sense and is used constantly for communication and awareness of the environment.

Noise is generally described as being 'unwanted' or 'unfavourable' sound and, to some extent, is an individual or subjective response as what may be sound to one person, may be regarded as noise by another.

The measurement and assessment of sound has been developed steadily over the last century, taking into account human response measures such as hearing damage and other potential health affects such as stress. Complex sound measurement and analytical devices have also been developed.

A-weighting and 'dBA'

The overall level of a sound is usually expressed in terms of dBA, which is measured using the 'A-weighting' filter incorporated in sound level meters. These filters have a frequency response corresponding approximately to that of human hearing. People's hearing is most sensitive to sounds at mid frequencies (typically 500 Hz to 4,000 Hz) and less sensitive at lower and higher frequencies. The level of a sound in dBA is a considered a good measure of the loudness of that sound. Different sources having the same dBA level generally sound about equally as loud, although the perceived loudness can also be affected by the character of the sound (e.g. the loudness of human speech and a distant motorbike may be perceived differently, although they can be of the same dBA level).

A change of up to 3 dBA in the level of a sound is difficult for most people to detect, whilst a 3 dBA to 5 dBA change corresponds to a small but noticeable change in loudness. A 10 dBA change corresponds to an approximate doubling or halving in loudness.

Table 1 below presents examples of typical noise levels.

Table 1 Typical Noise Levels

Sound Pressure Level (dBA)	Typical Source	Subjective Evaluation
130	Threshold of pain	Intolerable
120 110	Heavy rock concert Grinding on steel	Extremely noisy
100 90	Loud car horn at 3 m Construction site with pneumatic hammering	Very noisy
80 70	Kerbside of busy street Loud radio or television	Loud
60 50	Department store General Office	Moderate to quiet
40 30	Inside private office Inside bedroom	Quiet to very quiet
20	Unoccupied recording studio	Almost silent

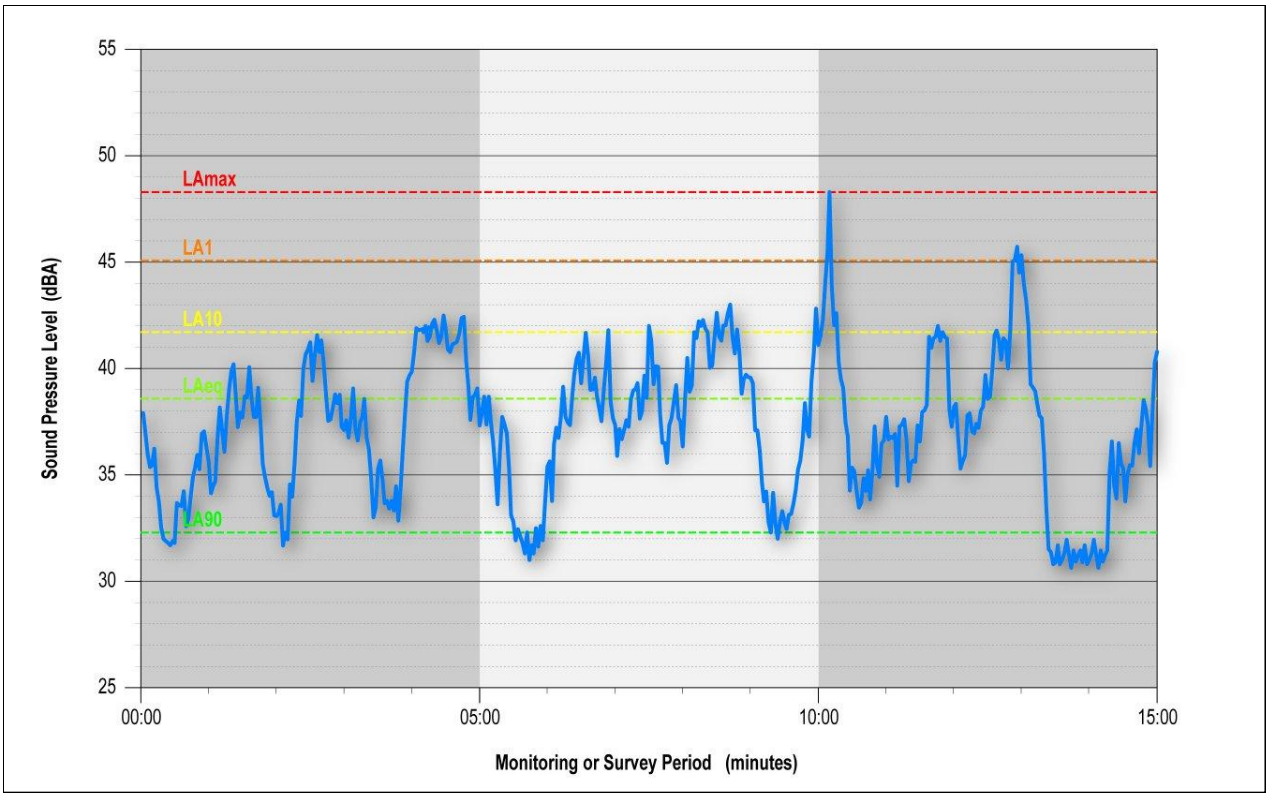
Statistical Noise Level Descriptors

As environmental noise usually varies in level over time, it is common to present the results of environmental noise testing in the form of statistical descriptors.

An explanation of noise level descriptors typically used for assessing the noise environment are illustrated in **Figure 1** and described below.

LAmax	The maximum A-weighted noise level associated with a noise measurement interval.
LA1	The noise level exceeded for 1% of a given measurement period. This parameter is often used to represent the typical maximum noise level in a given interval.
LA10	The A-weighted sound pressure level exceeded 10% of a given measurement interval and is utilised normally to characterise average maximum noise levels.
LAeq	The A-weighted equivalent continuous sound level. It is defined as the steady sound level that contains the same amount of acoustical energy as a given time-varying sound over the same measurement interval. Can be loosely thought of as the 'average'.
LA90	The A-weighted sound pressure level exceeded 90% of a given measurement interval and is representative of the average minimum sound level. Often used to describe the 'background' level.

Figure 1 Graphical Display of Typical Noise Descriptors



Character

The A-weighted noise level alone is a simplistic parameter and may not be sufficient in providing a thorough assessment of noise. The subjective character of a sound is also a significant parameter that needs to be considered.

Some basic characteristics of sound which can make a sound more or less intrusive include:

- The frequency content of a sound – i.e. low frequency sound such as exhaust noise or high frequency sound such as birds or insects,

- the ‘tonality’ of a sound – i.e. sound contains one or more prominent tones such as a horn or a whistle,

- the ‘impulsiveness’ of a sound – i.e. hammering, dog barking or a intermittently operating power saw.

The above parameters can usually be indicatively subjectively assessed, but more thorough assessment can be made with advanced sound measuring devices (i.e. narrow band or one-third octave analysis). Many noise policies provide an assessment method which applies penalties to sounds that exhibit particular characteristics such as the above.

Frequency Analysis

Frequency analysis is the process used to examine the tones (or frequency components) which make up the overall noise or vibration signal. This analysis was traditionally carried out using analogue electronic filters, but is now normally carried out using Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) analysers.

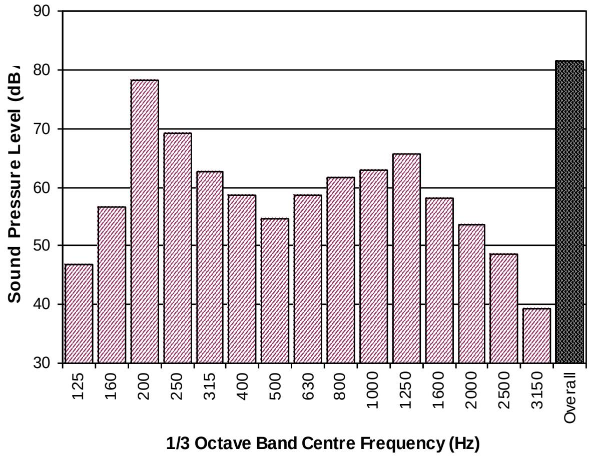
The units for frequency are Hertz (Hz), which represent the number of cycles per second.

Frequency analysis can be in:

- Octave bands (where the centre frequency and width of each band is double the previous band)
- 1/3 octave bands (3 bands in each octave band)
- Narrow band (where the spectrum is divided into 400 or more bands of equal width)

Figure 2 shows a 1/3 octave band frequency analysis where the noise is dominated by the 200 Hz band. Note that the indicated level of each individual band is less than the overall level, which is the logarithmic sum of the bands.

Figure 2 Representative 1/3 Octave Band Analysis



Vibration

Vibration may be defined as cyclic or transient motion. This motion can be measured in terms of its displacement, velocity or acceleration. Most assessments of human response to vibration or the risk of damage to buildings use measurements of vibration velocity. These may be expressed in terms of “peak” velocity or “rms” velocity.

The former is the maximum instantaneous velocity, without any averaging, and is sometimes referred to as “peak particle velocity”, or PPV. The latter incorporates “root mean squared” averaging over some defined time period.

Vibration measurements may be carried out in a single axis or alternatively as triaxial measurements. Where triaxial measurements are used, the axes are commonly designated vertical, longitudinal (aligned toward the source) and transverse.

The common units for velocity are millimetres per second (mm/s). As with noise, decibel units can also be used, in which case the reference level should always be stated. A vibration level V, expressed in mm/s can be converted to decibels by the formula 20 log (V/V_o), where V_o is the reference level (1E-6 mm/s). Care is required in this regard, as other reference levels are used by some organizations.

Human Perception of Vibration

People are able to “feel” vibration at levels lower than those required to cause even superficial damage to the most susceptible classes of building (even though they may not be disturbed by the motion). An individual's perception of motion or response to vibration depends very strongly on previous experience and expectations, and on other connotations associated with the perceived source of the vibration. For example, the vibration that a person responds to as “normal” in a car, bus or train is considerably higher than what is perceived as “normal” in a shop, office or dwelling.

Over-Pressure

The term “over-pressure” is used to describe the air pressure pulse emitted during blasting or similar events. The peak level of an event is normally measured using a microphone in the same manner as linear noise (ie unweighted), at frequencies both in and below the audible range.