

noise

Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland

2003/2004



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



ENVIRONMENT
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An Agency within the Department of the
Environment
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Introduction

The commonly accepted definition of noise is 'sound which is undesired by the recipient'. In other words, noise can be any sound which is intrusive, disturbing or annoying.

Noise is one of the environmental pollutants most often complained about, yet least often reported. The purpose of this report is to inform central government, district councils, the general public and any other interested parties as to the extent of noise complaints made to district councils in Northern Ireland.

Whilst complaints will also be received by other public bodies, such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the main legislative controls and responsibility for investigating and dealing with noise complaints lies with district councils. This report provides an analysis of all noise complaints received by councils from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004, and is the first such report produced for Northern Ireland.

The Department of the Environment regards the information derived from this report as an important indicator on the effectiveness of current controls on noise. Reporting these statistics will enable Departmental officials to target policy development and research needs more appropriately in respect of environmental noise. It will also provide an opportunity for district councils to compare their noise statistics with those of neighbouring authorities.

This report extends the work already conducted by organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection into researching noise complaint statistics throughout the United Kingdom. It is intended that the Department will publish these statistics on an annual basis.

The Noise Complaints

Noise complaint returns were provided by all twenty-six district councils, which means this report provides a comprehensive picture of the Northern Ireland noise environment. Councils receive a wide variety of complaints about noise and for ease of reporting the statistics have been grouped together under several main categories and sub-categories. A summary of all the data provided by councils is contained in Tables 1 and 2.

To make a direct comparison between council areas, the complaints were also considered in terms of the relevant population density. Figure 1 illustrates the numbers of noise complaints received by individual councils per 1,000 people in each district area, based on 2001 census data.

Councils receiving the highest level of noise complaints per head of population were Belfast, Coleraine and Carrickfergus. Fermanagh and Cookstown reported the lowest level of noise complaint.

What can be done about noise?

Article 38 of The Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 gives district councils power to deal with noise from premises, including land, which they consider amounts to a statutory nuisance. These powers apply not only to the control of existing noise, but also where a noise is expected to occur or recur. Where a council is satisfied that a nuisance exists it must serve a legal notice requiring the abatement of that noise nuisance.

Details of all noise notices served by district councils under The Pollution Control and Local Government Order are contained in Table 2. It can be seen that the majority of these notices are issued in relation to noise emanating from domestic premises.

Councils also have discretion to adopt The Noise Act 1996, which provides additional powers to deal with noise at night from domestic premises. These powers include provision to issue warning notices, fixed penalty notices and in certain circumstances to seize noise making equipment. Only Belfast City Council has adopted The Noise Act in Northern Ireland and the numbers of these notices has been reported in Table 2.

Figure 2 illustrates the numbers of all noise notices served by district councils in Northern Ireland per 100 complaints received by the council. Overall it can be seen that relatively few noise notices are issued by district councils, in 2003/04 11 councils did not issue any noise abatement notices. This reflects the informal approach, which is generally adopted by councils in dealing with noise complaints, the degree of evidence required by individual councils and also the Northern Ireland legislative framework.

Where notices are not complied with, councils can instigate legal proceedings for non-compliance. During 2003/04 there were a total of 7 prosecutions taken in Northern Ireland by district councils for noise offences: Ards (1); Armagh (2); Belfast (2); Coleraine (1); Newry & Mourne (1).

Sources of Noise

Analysis of the data reveals that most complaints made to district councils relate to domestic noise sources. This category or sector accounts for 82% of all complaints, as illustrated by Figure 3.

Further analysis of this sector is shown in Figure 4, which illustrates that the domestic noise source most complained about is music, television and parties. This is followed closely by animal noise, which is mostly attributed to barking dogs.

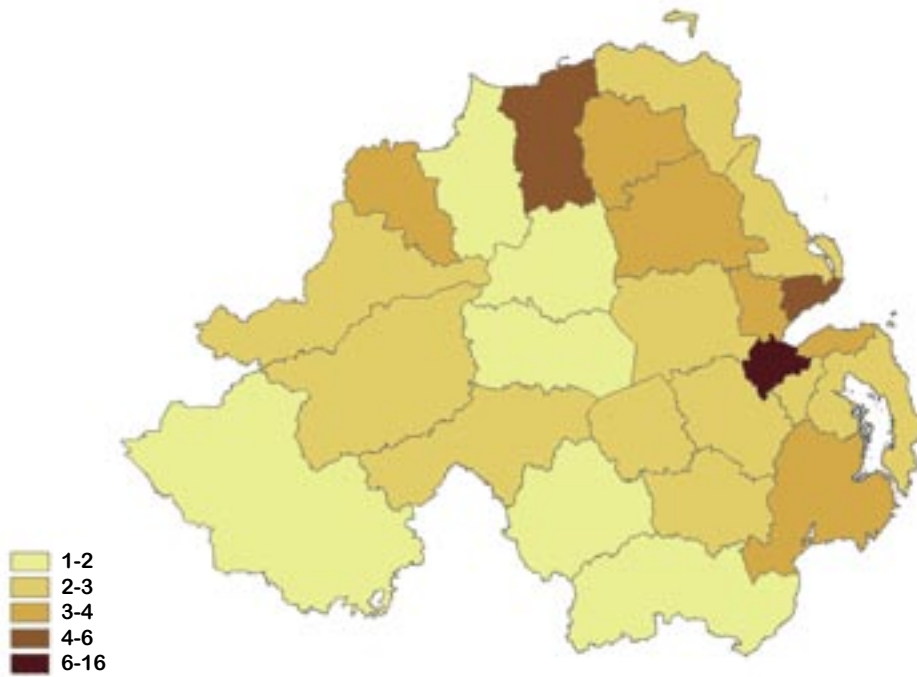
Figure 4 also illustrates the situation in respect to the other main categories, with the exception of construction and demolition noise which has no further sub-divisions.

In relation to the commercial sector, most annoyance is caused by entertainment noise sources, which account for 38% of complaints. Security alarms and sports and leisure events also feature heavily.

Noise from road traffic is the most dominant complaint in the transport sector with 38%. Aircraft noise accounts for 21%, though most of these relate to military sources in the Belfast area.

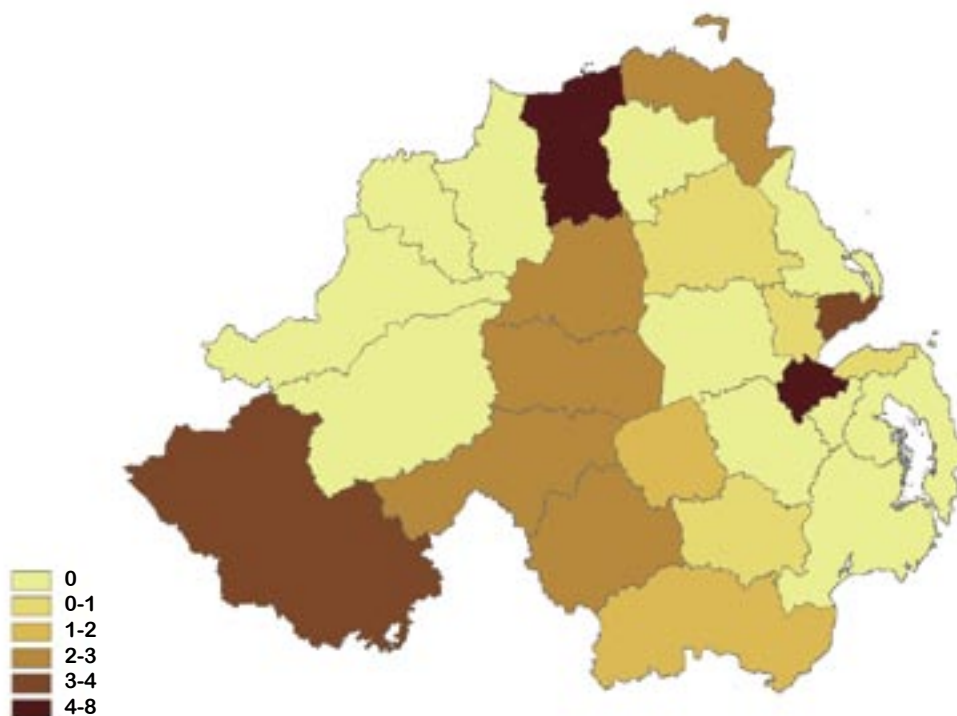
Noise Complaints per 1000 Population

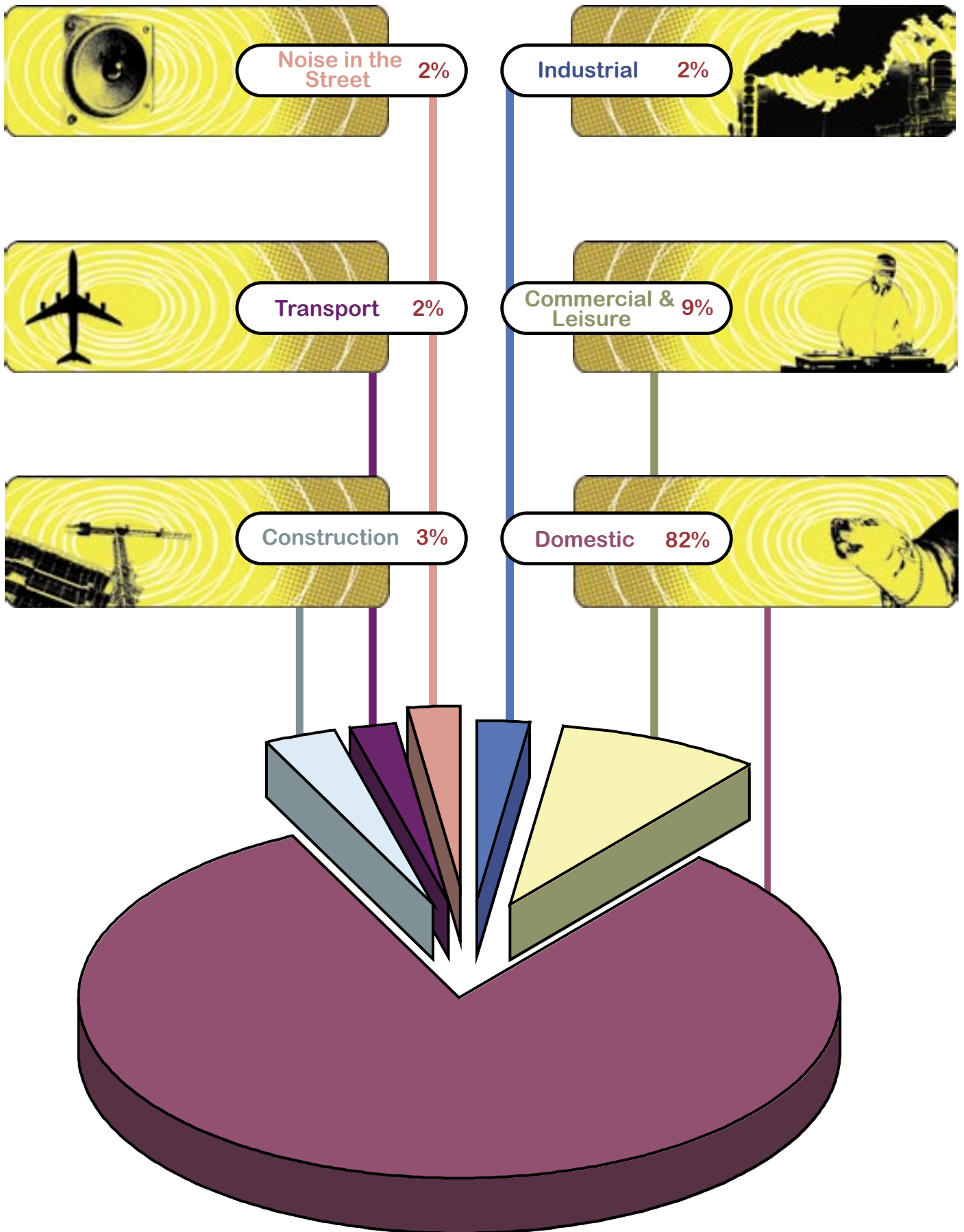
Figure 1



Notices Served per 100 Complaints Received

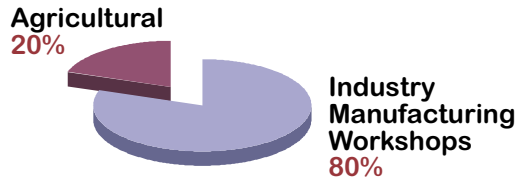
Figure 2



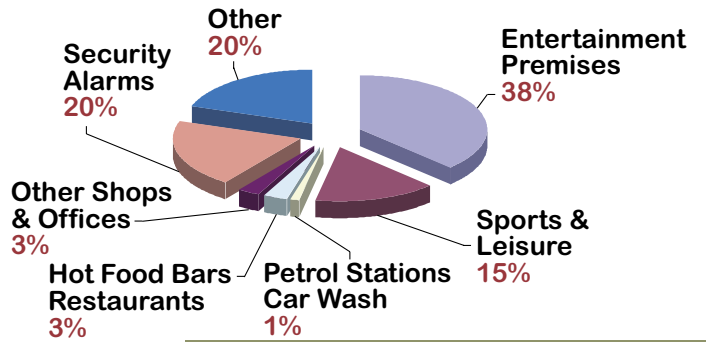




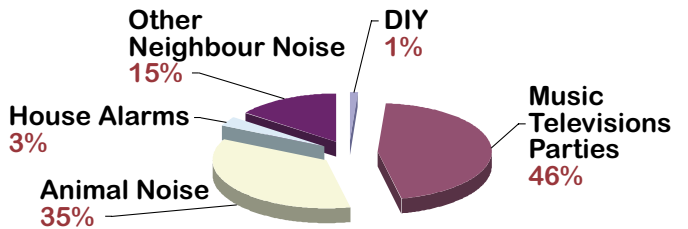
Industrial



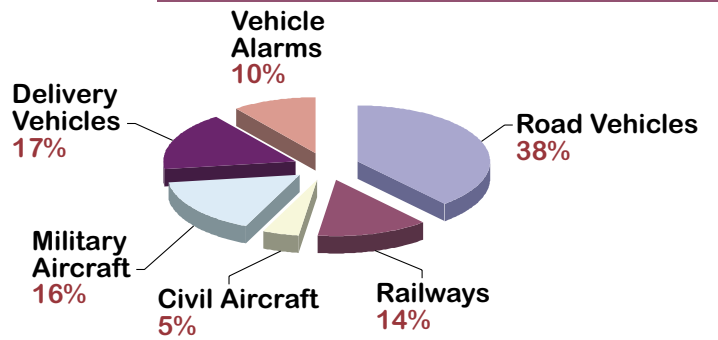
Commercial & Leisure



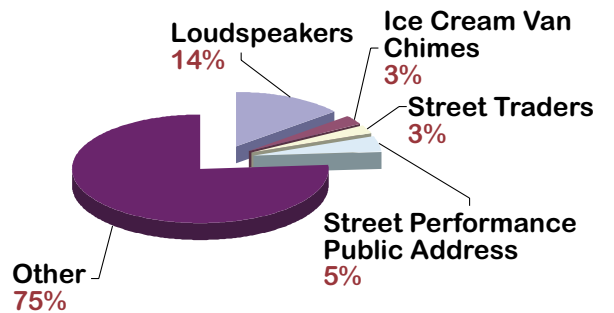
Domestic



Transport



Noise in the Street



Further Information

Further information on noise matters in general, or the content of this report may be obtained from Environment and Heritage Service at the following address:

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Environment and Heritage Service
Commonwealth House
35 Castle Street
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BT1 1GU

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