

NOISE

Complaint Statistics
for Northern Ireland 2005 - 2006



Department of the
Environment
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INTRODUCTION

This is the third report into noise complaint statistics for Northern Ireland. The purpose of the report is to inform central government, district councils, the general public and any other interested parties as to the extent of public complaints about noise, which are referred to district councils in Northern Ireland. Once again, the main finding is that complaints about noise are on the increase.

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 is least often reported publicly. District councils are the organisations empowered to deal with the vast majority of noise pollution in Northern Ireland and this report provides an analysis of noise complaints received by all 26 district councils during the period from 01 April 2005 to 31 March 2006.

Councils receive a wide variety of complaints about noise and for ease of reporting these have been categorised into the following main noise sources:

- Industrial
- Commercial and leisure
- Domestic
- Construction, demolition or road works
- Transport
- Noise in the street

These sources of noise have been further divided into sub-categories that represent the individual areas of most concern to those people that make complaints to their local council. Details of these sub-categories can be found in Table 1.

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





TOO LOUD?

You're **Allowed** to Complain

AWARENESS OF NOISE

The extent to which people complain about noise to councils will not only depend on the degree of disturbance, but also on awareness of council noise services and the level and type of service provided by individual councils.

During the reporting period of this document, the Department's Environment and Heritage Service continued its campaign to raise awareness of noise issues within the community.

Leading with the message "Too Loud? – You're Allowed to Complain", television adverts used striking imagery and annoying sounds to deliver a socially responsible message to a wide audience. This campaign was conducted from January to March 2006 and focused primarily on informing those people affected by noise that redress was available in the form of help from their local council.

Noise makers were also reminded that "Too Loud is Not Allowed" and encouraged to adopt a more responsible attitude to potentially noisy activities such as playing music and keeping pets such as dogs.

Independently conducted research confirmed the success of this campaign with 90% of respondents saying that it was informative. There were also distinct changes in attitude to the issue of noise with 84% of people surveyed saying that the campaign made them think about the seriousness of the issue. Furthermore, 70% regarded noise as a serious issue, and almost half of those surveyed said they are likely to complain about noisy neighbours.

The 2004/05 campaign was accorded the 2005 John Connell Award and an advertising effectiveness award in recognition of this success.

In December 2005, the Department produced guidance to raise awareness about barking dogs. This leaflet entitled "*Is your dog barking too much?*" advises dog owners that constant barking can be avoided and describes simple steps that can be taken to ensure that barking does not annoy neighbours.

The Department also continued to support the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection (NSCA) in organising the annual "Noise Action Week" event. This gives everyone involved in managing noise an opportunity to raise awareness of the problems excessive noise can cause and the actions we can all take to mitigate noise. It was held from the 23 to 27 May 2005 and involved 16 district councils in Northern Ireland participating in awareness raising activity. Council activities included the promotion of a house alarm key holder registration scheme in Belfast and a 'Barking Mad Roadshow' conducted jointly by Antrim Borough Council and The Dogs Trust.





NOISE COMPLAINTS

This report contains noise complaint statistics from all 26 district councils in Northern Ireland and thus provides an extensive data set on noise pollution for the entire region. In total 11,337 complaints were made to councils about noise in 2005/06.

A summary of all the data returned by the councils is contained in Tables 1 and 2. This is an exhaustive set of statistics and in order to make a direct comparison between council areas the complaints are 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 can be clearly identified as Belfast and Coleraine. Those areas reporting the lowest levels of noise complaint are Castlereagh, Dungannon, Fermanagh and Magherafelt.

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. Where a council is satisfied that a nuisance exists it is required to serve a legal notice requiring the abatement of that noise nuisance.

In total, council officers issued 142 Noise abatement notices during 2005/06 under The Pollution Control and Local Government Order. Details of all noise notices served by district councils are contained in Table 2. It can be seen that the majority of these notices were 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 during 2005/06 council officers issued 218 notices under this legislation (see Table 2).

Figure 2 illustrates the numbers of all noise notices served by district councils in Northern Ireland. For purposes of comparison these are expressed per 100 complaints received by the council. Overall it can be seen that relatively few noise notices are issued by district councils compared to the level of complaints received. This reflects a strong emphasis by councils on informal measures and mediations to resolve complaints at an early stage. Councils reporting the highest level of enforcement activity were Coleraine and Belfast. During 2005/06 six councils did not issue any noise abatement notices.

In dealing with complaints, council staff endeavour to seek co-operation and agreement to obtain a solution. Hence an informal approach is generally adopted initially to resolve noise complaints. Where this fails and evidence of a nuisance exists then more formal action is instigated. This includes the issue of verbal warnings and written warnings which will often be sufficient to ensure the desired outcome. If required a formal notice is issued, however, a frequent difficulty for councils is obtaining sufficient evidence to justify the issue of a noise notice.

Where notices are not complied with, councils may instigate legal proceedings for non-compliance. During 2005/06 there were a total of eight prosecutions taken in Northern Ireland by district councils for noise offences: Armagh (2); Belfast (2); Craigavon (1); Dungannon (1); Limavady (1); North Down (1).

SOURCES OF NOISE

Analysis of the data reveals that most complaints made to district councils relate to domestic noise sources. This category accounts for 85% of all complaints as illustrated by Figure 3.

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

Figure 4 also shows the breakdown of complaints in the other main categories, with the exception of construction and demolition noise which has no further sub-divisions. In relation to the commercial sector, the public appears to be most annoyed by entertainment noise sources, which account for 39% of complaints. Also of prominence in this sector are sporting events and commercial security alarms.

Noise from road traffic is the most dominant complaint in the transport sector with 42% of that category. This is followed by complaints about noise from delivery vehicles and car alarms.



TREND ANALYSIS

This is only the third year for which complete results are available but already an interesting picture of the noise environment in Northern Ireland is developing. In comparison to 2004/05, there were an additional 1,290 or 13% more noise complaints during 2005/06. More significantly, Northern Ireland has experienced a 35% increase in complaints about noise over the last three years. Full details of these annual changes are illustrated in Figure 5. Domestic noise is clearly the source showing the greatest rise, with an increase of almost 40% in complaints about neighbour generated noise since 2003/04.

Upon closer inspection it can be seen that the increases in domestic complaints relate to all sources in that category, apart from DIY noise which has shown a slight decrease in complaints over the last year. This is illustrated in Figure 6. The most substantive increase relates to animal noise, which is up by 20% over the last year and by a staggering 62% over the last three years. Most of these complaints can be attributed to barking dogs.

Another significant domestic noise source is loud music and parties. Complaints about this activity are up 11% on last year and by 26% over the last three years.

Noise from house alarms has also provoked an increase in response from the public. Over the last year 325 complaints were received about these, which represents an increase of 52% on the preceding year.

In general, the industrial and commercial sectors also exhibited greater numbers of complaints. Most notably these related to noise from indoor and outdoor concerts and leisure events. Complaints about noise from industry have steadily increased by 17% since 2003/04. Noise complaints from agricultural activity have remained reasonably static over this period. This is illustrated by Figures 8 and 9.

Complaints about noise in the street have significantly increased by 46% on last year as can be seen in Figure 10. This is largely due to a relatively high number of complaints in the 'other' sub-category, which has gone up by the same token. These are mainly attributable to boisterous and anti-social behaviour in public places.

The percentage change in complaint numbers per district council is illustrated in Figure 11. The most significant increases in noise complaints over the last year have been experienced by Moyle and Limavady districts. The most significant reductions in noise complaints were reported by Banbridge and Carrickfergus councils.

In respect of action against noise there has been a slight increase in enforcement activity from councils with just over 6% more warning and abatement notices being served on noise offenders during 2005/06 compared to the year before. As illustrated in Table 2 this amounted to 360 notices. Also illustrated are the numbers of prosecutions enacted by councils against noise offenders. In total eight cases were taken to court during 2005/06, which is nine less than last year.

The continuing rise in the number of complaints demonstrates that noise is a problem that affects the quality of life of many people with increasing frequency. Our environment is undoubtedly becoming noisier and the problem of noise pollution and a desire to seek help in redressing its impact is certain to continue. Many neighbour noise problems in particular are a result of incompatible lifestyles in our modern world and a lack of consideration for the rights of others. The Department considers that better education is one way of tackling the problem, and is committed to increasing its efforts to highlight the seriousness of the issue and to better inform the public of how to gain help with noise problems.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on noise matters in general, or the content of this report may be obtained from Department of the Environment, Environmental Policy Division at the following address:

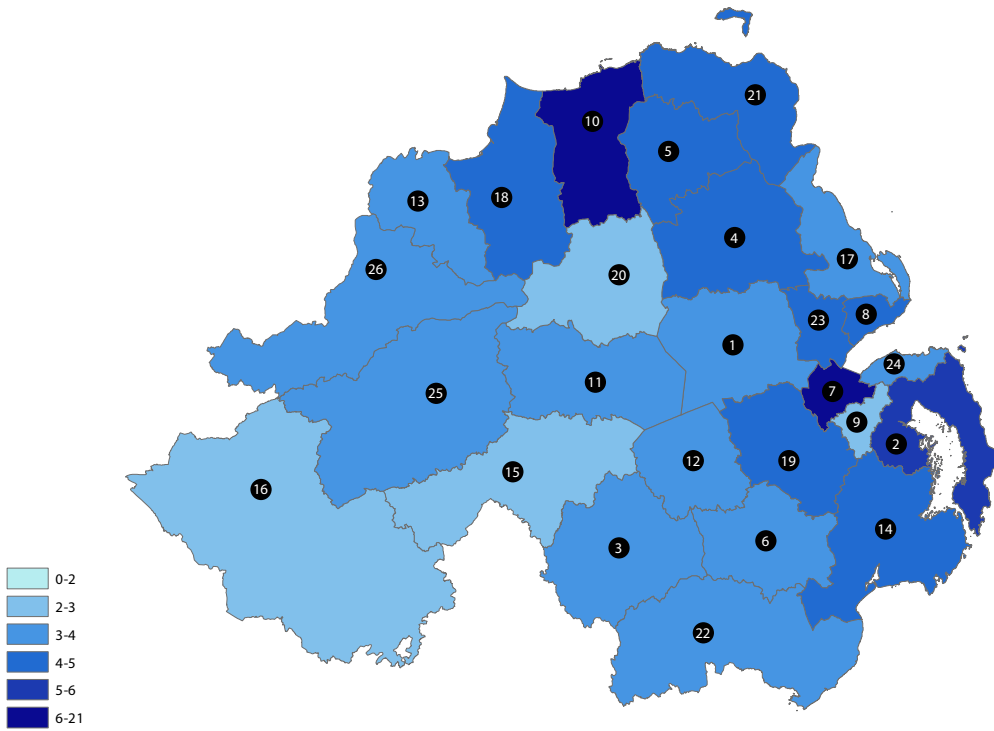
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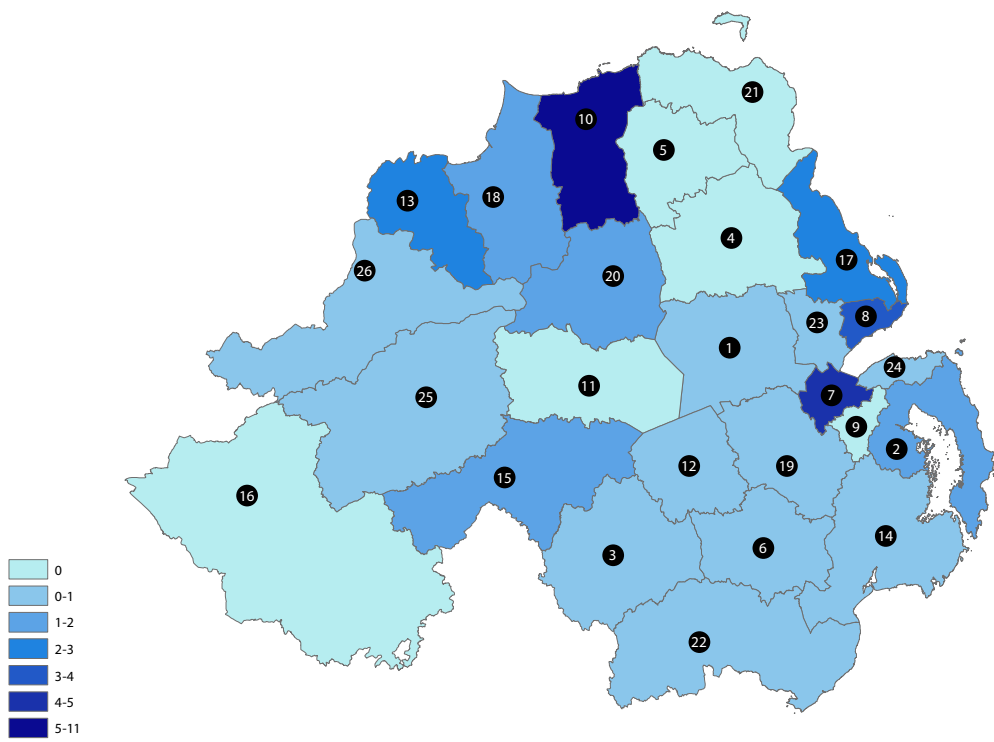


Figure 1
Noise Complaints per 1000 Population



- 1 Antrim
- 2 Ards
- 3 Armagh City & District
- 4 Ballymena
- 5 Ballymoney
- 6 Banbridge
- 7 Belfast
- 8 Carrickfergus
- 9 Castlereagh
- 10 Coleraine
- 11 Cookstown
- 12 Craigavon
- 13 Derry
- 14 Down
- 15 Dungannon & South Tyrone

Figure 2
Notices Served per 100 Complaints Received



- 16 Fermanagh
- 17 Larne
- 18 Limavady
- 19 Lisburn
- 20 Magherafelt
- 21 Moyle
- 22 Newry & Mourne
- 23 Newtownabbey
- 24 North Down
- 25 Omagh
- 26 Strabane

Table 1
Total Noise Complaints Received By District Council

COUNCIL	Category of Source																				TOTAL							
	Industrial	Commercial & Leisure							Domestic				Construction	Transport					Noise in the Street									
	Industry Manufacturing Workshops	Agricultural	Entertainment Premises	Sports & Leisure	Petrol Stations Car Wash	Restaurants Hot Food Bars	Other Shops & Offices	Security Alarms	Other	DIY	Music Televisions Parties	Animal Noise	House Alarms	Other Neighbour Noise	Construction Sites Demolition Works Road Works	Road Vehicles	Railways	Civil Aircraft	Military Aircraft	Delivery Vehicles		Vehicle Alarms	Loudspeakers	Ice Cream Van Chimes	Street Traders	Street Performance Public Address	Other	
Antrim	4	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	32	110	1	14	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	7	181
Ards	5	3	4	34	0	0	0	1	10	3	84	197	6	38	8	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	397
Armagh	3	0	9	2	1	2	1	0	2	0	37	131	0	6	3	6	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	207	
Ballymena	5	3	1	3	1	1	0	2	0	3	76	133	1	35	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	1	274
Ballymoney	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	12	94	1	14	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	128
Banbridge	1	4	1	7	0	1	1	0	0	3	35	85	3	7	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	155
Belfast	8	0	200	13	0	6	28	87	20	34	2666	1030	278	823	271	13	7	3	9	21	11	23	1	1	11	150	5714	
Carrickfergus	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	9	0	30	95	5	12	3	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	163
Castlereagh	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	4	4	43	92	7	28	6	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	198
Coleraine	10	3	15	2	0	2	4	6	5	1	82	256	4	21	14	8	2	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	14	454
Cookstown	10	4	3	0	0	3	0	0	6	0	21	44	0	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	102
Craigavon	11	6	1	1	0	0	1	2	4	2	104	146	0	12	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	300
Derry	8	0	7	3	0	2	4	4	2	4	119	171	3	26	8	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	369
Down	14	1	19	11	1	7	1	0	2	3	45	115	3	43	8	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	279
Dungannon	10	5	2	9	0	1	0	1	3	0	45	57	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	145
Fermanagh	3	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	33	112	1	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	164
Larne	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	6	0	32	61	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	111
Limavady	2	0	1	0	1	6	0	1	0	0	46	90	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	155
Lisburn	23	5	6	22	5	1	4	3	0	4	121	239	3	33	16	6	4	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	500
Magherafelt	8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	24	52	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	94
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	15	45	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	68
Newry & Mourne	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	64	125	3	59	10	4	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	282
Newtonabbey	6	1	2	10	0	0	1	5	8	7	62	177	3	31	12	5	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	339
North Down	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	3	4	5	51	141	3	27	3	0	0	4	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	251
Omagh	16	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	1	27	73	0	16	15	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	7	163
Strabane	11	1	0	8	1	0	2	0	1	2	25	81	0	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	144
TOTAL	176	39	284	128	13	36	57	120	94	80	3931	3952	325	1280	399	66	14	10	12	42	15	31	6	3	15	209	11337	

Table 2
Total Notices Served By District Council

COUNCIL	Pollution Control & Local Government (NI) Order														NOISE ACT		TOTAL NOTICES	PROSECUTIONS	
	Industrial	Commercial & Leisure							Domestic				Construction	Warning Notices	Fixed Penalty Notices				
	Industry Manufacturing Workshops	Agricultural	Entertainment Premises	Sports & Leisure	Petrol Stations Car Wash	Restaurants Hot Food Bars	Other Shops & Offices	Security Alarms	Other	DIY	Music Televisions Parties	Animal Noise	House Alarms			Other Neighbour Noise			Construction Sites Demolition Works Road Works
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
Ards	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	6	0
Armagh	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	2
Ballymena	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0
Banbridge	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
Belfast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	11	4	23	0	2	209	9	265	2
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	n/a	n/a	6	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	50	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0
Craigavon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	1
Derry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	2	0	0	n/a	n/a	10	0
Down	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
Dungannon	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	1
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0
Larne	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	3	0
Limavady	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	3	1
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
Newtonabbey	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
North Down	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	1
Omagh	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0
TOTAL	7	0	1	6	0	0	0	5	2	0	74	16	27	2	2	209	9	360	8

Figure 3
Total Noise Complaints

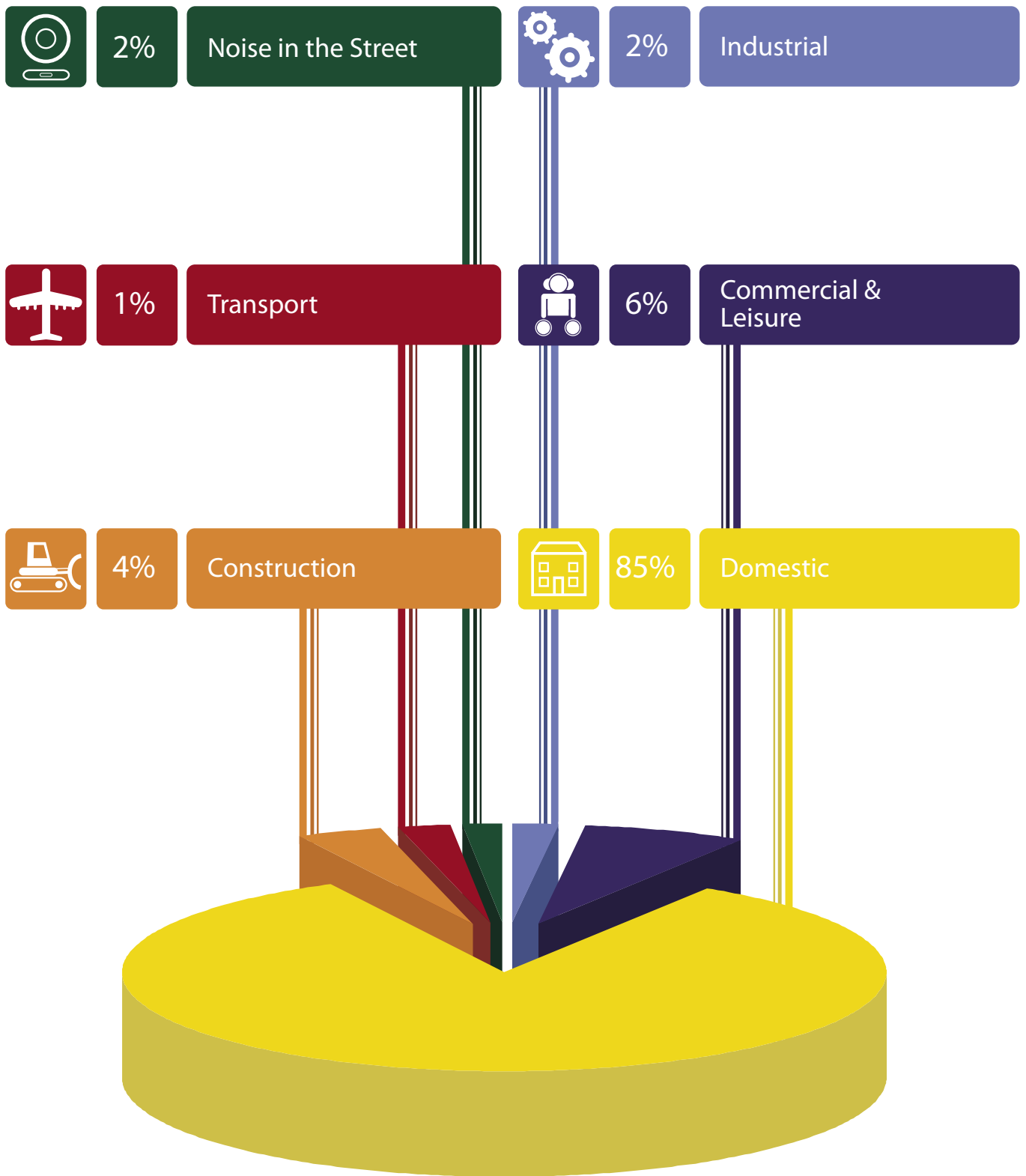
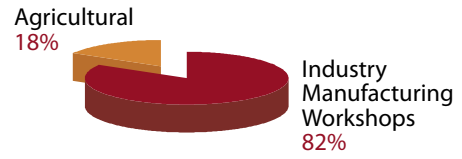
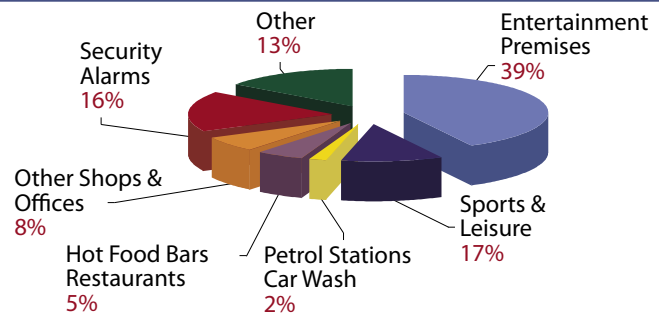


Figure 4
Noise Complaint Categories

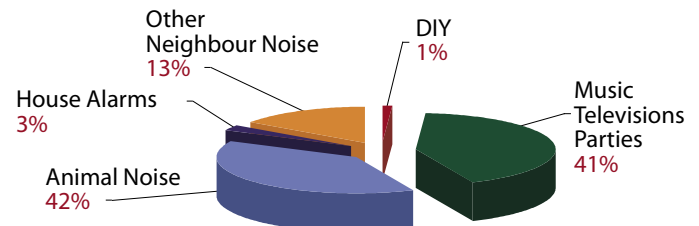
 Industrial



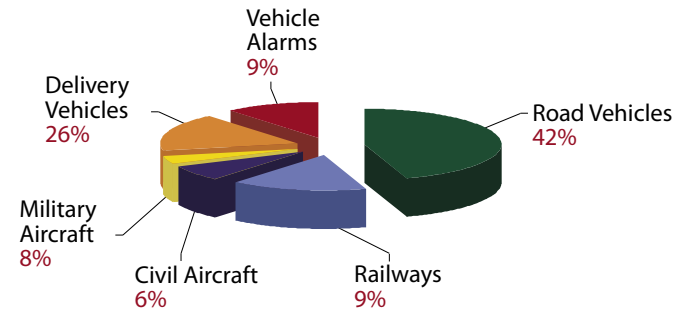
 Commercial & Leisure




 Domestic



 Transport



 Noise in the Street

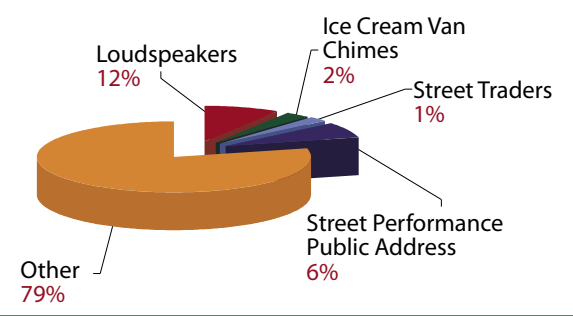


Figure 5
Noise Complaints: 2004 - 2006 Comparison

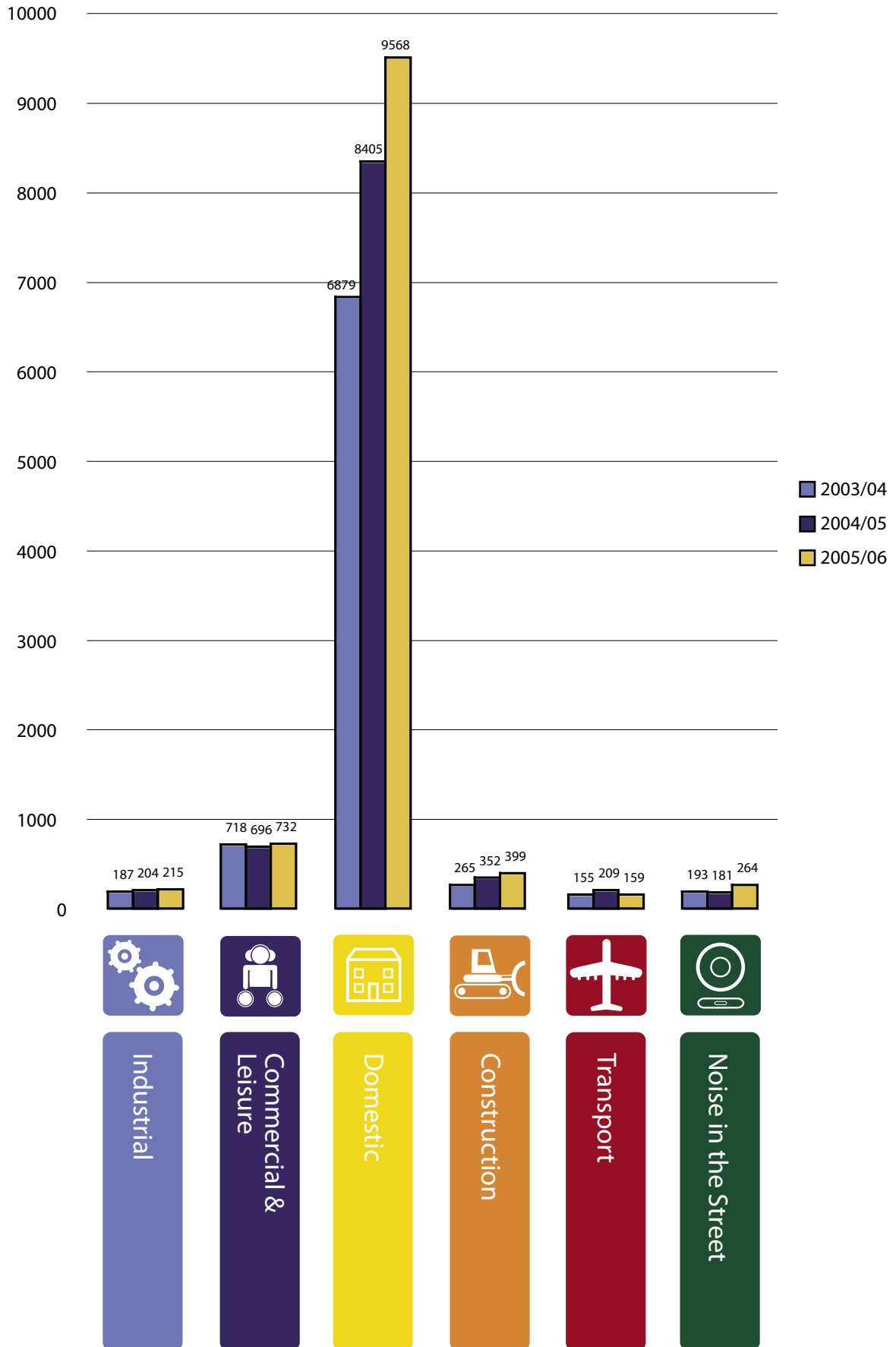


Figure 6
Domestic Complaints Comparisons 2004 - 2006

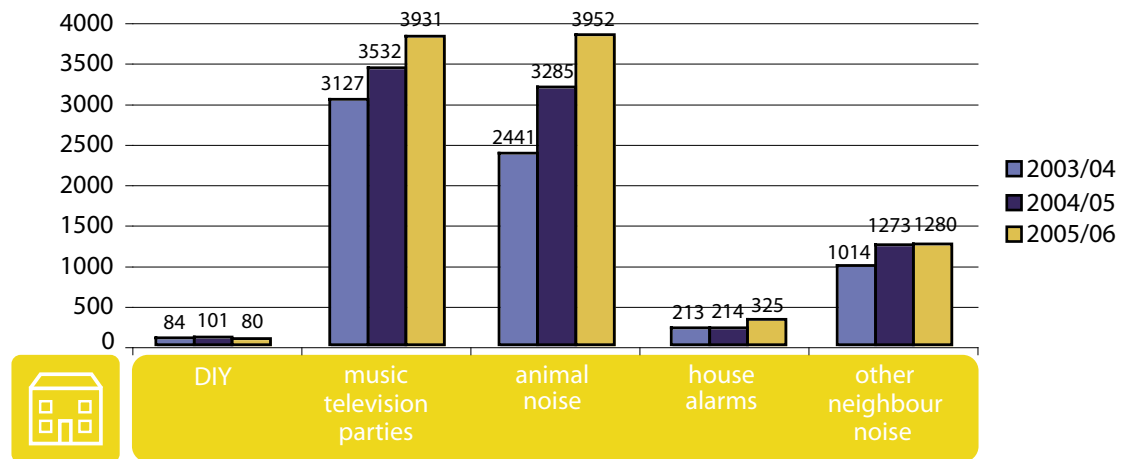


Figure 7
Transport Complaints Comparisons 2004 - 2006

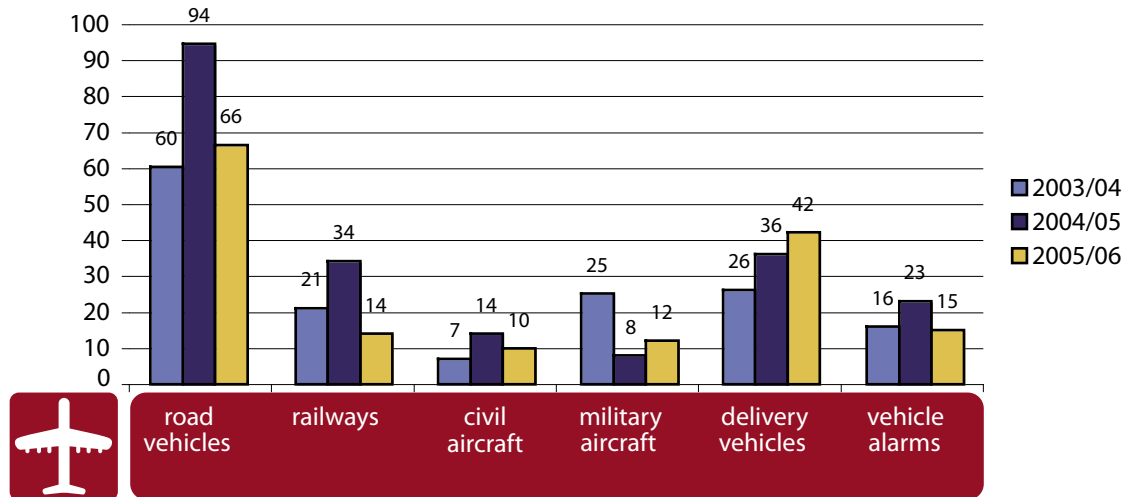


Figure 8
Industrial Complaints Comparisons 2004 - 2006

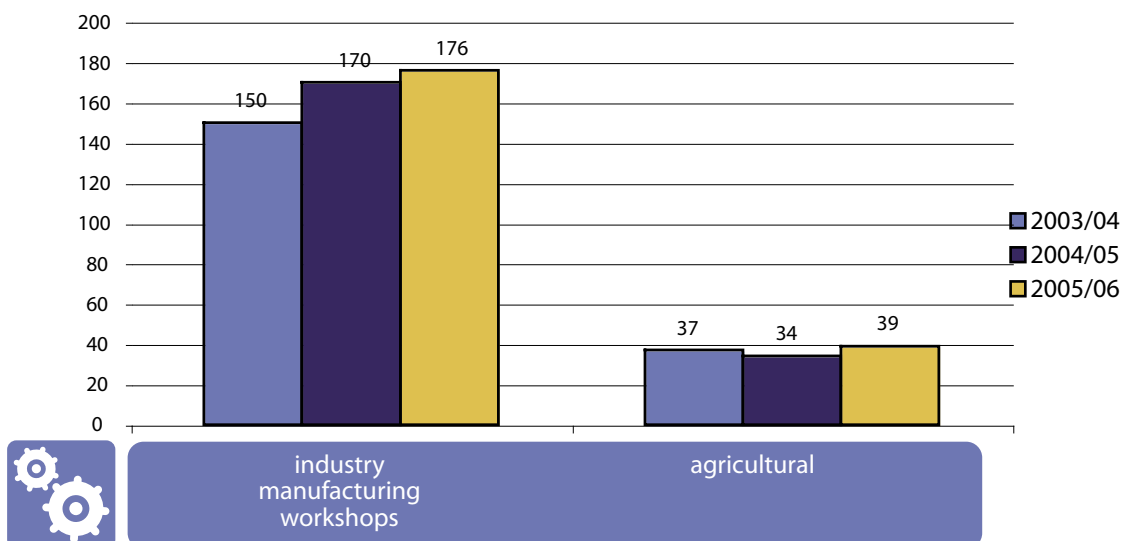


Figure 9
Commercial and Leisure Complaints Comparisons 2004 - 2006

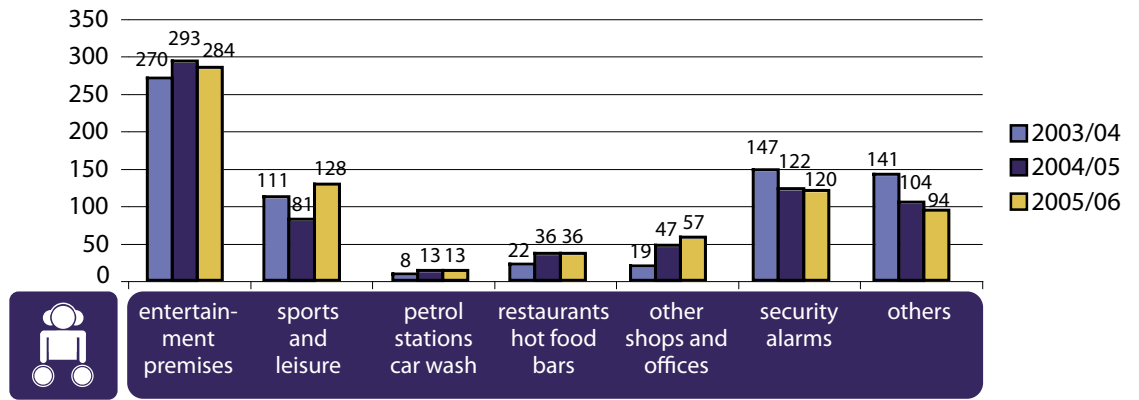


Figure 10
Noise in the Street Complaints Comparisons 2004 - 2006

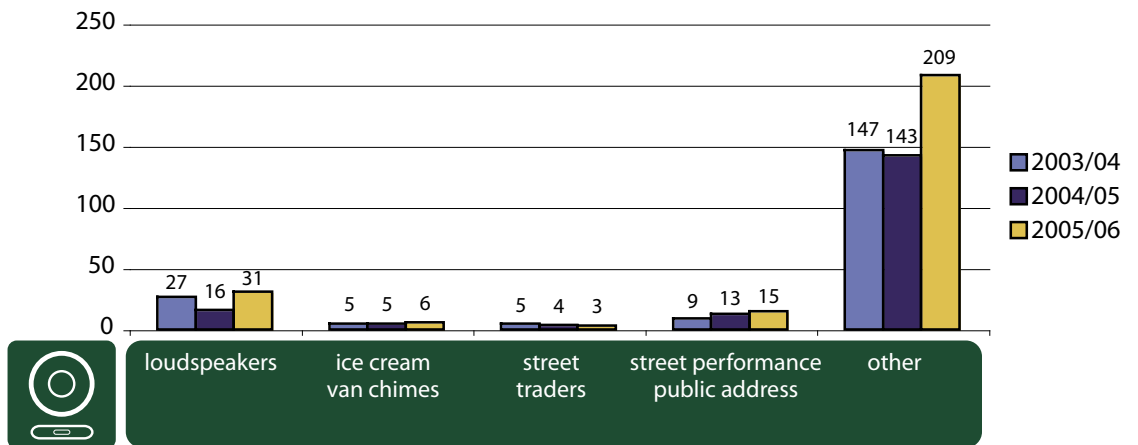
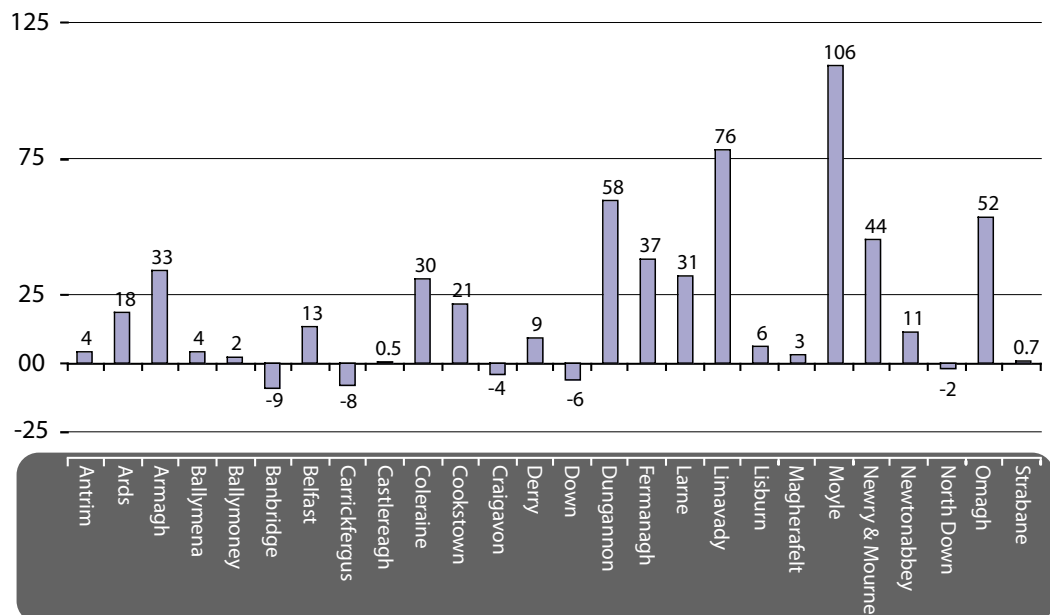


Figure 11
Percentage change in complaint numbers 2004/05 - 2005/06





Department of the
Environment

www.doeni.gov.uk

"The Department's aim is to secure a better and safer environment and support effective local government".

Further information on noise matters in general, or the content of this report may be obtained from Department of the Environment, Environmental Policy Division at the following address:

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