

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

General Plan Legislation

A Noise Element has been a requirement of the General Plan since 1971. In 1975, amendments to the legislation were made and the Office of Noise Control, Department of Health Services, issued a set of Noise Element Guidelines. Amendments addressing the content of the Noise Element were adopted by the State legislature in 1985. Section 65302 (f) of the California Government Code requires:

A noise element shall identify and appraise noise problems in the community. The noise element shall recognize guidelines established by the Office of Noise Control in the State Department of Health Services and shall analyze and quantify, to the extent practicable, as determined by the legislative body, current and projected noise levels.

Current and projected noise levels are required for several sources such as highways and freeways; local streets and primary arterials; railroad operations; airport operations; local industrial plants; and other ground stationary noise sources.

Noise is often identified as unwanted sound. Although sound is measurable, noise is subjective. The effects of sound on people range from annoyance and inconvenience to temporary or permanent hearing loss. Every day people are subjected to a multitude of sounds at home or in the work place. The relationship between measurable sound and human irritation is the key to understanding noise impact.

The A-weighted decibel, commonly abbreviated as dB(A), has been devised to relate sound to the sensitivity of the human hearing system. This scale is calibrated to the faintest sound audible, and has approximately the same frequency response as the human hearing system. A listener often judges an increase in sound levels of 10 dB(A) as a doubling of sound.