Sound Pollution

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The old expression, "Silence is golden," has taken on a new meaning amidst a burgeoning campaign being waged across the country against noise pollution, and we in Lafayette should take note of this effort.

Silence has become literally golden, with homeowners paying 5 to 10 per cent of their original construction costs to block out the offensive uproar that has become endemic in America's cities and suburbs.

The noise pollution problem, like so many other environmental ills, is becoming the challenge of the architect, who is faced with growing complaints about noise from homes, apartment buildings and offices. Reading an article in the January issue of "Louisiana Architect," I reviewed some of the dangers of today's excessive noise levels and controls that architects and public officials are experimenting with.

What I found to be the most alarming piece of information in the article was the threat that this assault of sound poses to health. Such common sounds as those of kitchen blenders, motorcycles, lawn mowers, subways and hard rock bands are loud enough in some cases to cause damage to parts of the ear. Noise levels in cities have doubled since 1954, and today have become a major cause of ulcers, cardiovascular diseases and mental breakdowns. One acoustical specialist has even predicted that noise levels could become lethal within the next 30 years unless effective controls are put into use.

The seriousness of this country's noise pollution has prompted the American Institute of Architects to consider the problem. The AIA is confident that dangerous noises can be controlled if the public demands it. Three areas of attack have been recommended by the AIA:

- **Attack Areas**

  - Major environmental noises such as sonic booms from aircraft, highway truck traffic, vehicle horns and construction equipment must be subject to public control.
  - Architects must incorporate improved noise shielding into buildings.
  - Noise should be reduced or diverted by comprehensive planning in urban design.

The first area of attack, public control, already has been used successfully in "America's Quietest City," Memphis, Tenn. Since 1938 the city has had an ordinance banning "any unreasonable loud, disturbing and unnecessary noise," including automobile horns. Only 90 days after the ordinance went into effect, 50 motorists had been fined for excessive horn honking. Today the ordinance is an accepted part of life in Memphis, and the annoying sound of auto horns has all but disappeared.

Memphis' planners solved the problem of aircraft rumbles by discouraging construction of housing near flights with enactment of an approach zone.

**Quieter Trucks**

New York is another city which is trying to muffle its din with public control. An ordinance enacted one year ago requires that noise transference through walls of new apartments meet a specified legal standard. The city has begun using garbage cans with noise deflecting strips and is acquiring quieter garbage trucks. And a citizens group is planning to seek controls on cranes, trucks, construction equipment and other noise sources.

Since all excessive sounds cannot be completely eliminated at the source, however, the second area of attack, noise shielding, will be necessary in buildings. Architects can include those major sound reduction devices for under 5 to 10 per cent of the total building costs. Architects working with apartments have found noise can be reduced by separating one wall surface from another, leaving space between filled with acoustical material.