

Too Much Noise in Today's Workplace

Irritating noise can come from all kinds of sources, especially—from other people's voices.

NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, September 21, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- What do hypertension, sleep disorders, cardiovascular disease, impaired cognition and being annoyed have in common? All are possible outcomes of too much noise around us. Many people complain about noise, but fewer realize how harmful it can be. Turns out, hearing loss and ailments such as the ringing ears of tinnitus aren't the only things we should worry about. Evidence of the non-auditory effects of noise on health is growing, too.

In offices, irritating noise can come from all kinds of sources: air conditioning, obnoxious ringtones, traffic, nearby construction, unsophisticated sound-masking systems and—especially—from other people's voices, says Julian Treasure, chairman of a United Kingdom-based consultancy, The Sound Agency. Noisy environments tend to only get worse over time, because people start speaking louder as it gets noisier around them (known as the Lombard effect).

Being constantly alert to our environment, and noise easily makes us uneasy. Lab studies on humans as well as animals have shown that exposure to noise arouses the nervous system, causing rising blood pressure and the release of stress hormones. Over time, these instinctive responses can stress the cardiovascular system and give rise to negative outcomes such as anger and exhaustion.

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The World Health Organisation

Without an effective [acoustical solution](#), experts say, the negative impacts of day-to-day noise in many office environments can also be significant.

“Cognitively, there is plenty of research now that shows that the most destructive sound of all is other people's



Too much noise in today's open office



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conversations,” agrees Treasure. “We have bandwidth for roughly 1.6 human conversations. So, if you’re hearing somebody’s conversation, then that’s taking up 1 of your 1.6. Even if you don’t want to listen to it, you can’t stop it: You have no ear lids. And that means you’ve just .6 left to listen to your own inner voice.”

The noise level of 60-65 decibels that’s common in some open-plan offices is not only too loud for concentration, it can also impede effective collaboration by causing speech interference. The sound level of speech is about 60 decibels if people talk to one another, in normal tones without raising their voices, at a distance of about one meter (3 ¼ feet). This means any other noise within that same range—someone else talking nearby, for instance—can cause speech interference, so not all the words may be fully heard. “Nevertheless, a sentence may be understood because of cortical processing. This, however, is an active process that may cause reaction leading to adverse effects in the longer run of chronic noise exposure.”

In other words, in noisy environments with poor acoustics, workers can as easily get stressed by trying to hear others as by trying not to hear others—a lose/lose proposition.

The World Health Organization estimates that the annual cost to Europe from excessive noise levels is £30 billion. With over 70% of offices now open plan, with little to no worker segregation – think of all that lost productivity.

If you think the acoustic environment in your office could be harming employee productivity and well being, you don’t have to shell out tens of thousands of dollars. [Consider a practical solution](#) to reducing noise levels in your space that can be implemented immediately at little cost.

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