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Noise, Health, and Cleaning

By **Mike Schaffer** — posted 09/13/2011



Noise is a growing problem in the United States, as it can have a detrimental effect on health, mood, alertness, and energy. Outside and inside noise sources are plentiful, and include cars, planes, buses, building design, and even cleaning equipment.

Studies have found that noise levels of 100 decibels are loud enough to seriously hamper alertness and attention and cause temporary hearing loss. Noise levels of 95 decibels can result in skill and task errors as well as speech perception, while levels of 75 to 85 decibels are loud enough to interfere with in-person and telephone conversation and make it difficult to think.

Recent studies not only confirm that noise can affect mood and health, they have also determined that it can hamper learning in educational settings and impair judgment in hospitals.

Hospital Noise

The University of Houston recently conducted a study that sought to determine the least and most bothersome noises in a health care environment. Sound-measuring devices were placed in a variety of locations throughout 13 health care facilities. Then, more than 300 health care staff members were asked to rank the recorded noises from least to most bothersome.

According to the report, the least bothersome noises were normal conversation between staff and patients and call lights. The most bothersome noises were intercoms and buzzers, telephones, and cleaning equipment.

In fact, this report found vacuum cleaners, at up to 90 decibels, to be the loudest and most bothersome cleaning tool used in a medical facility. They were followed by floor machines such as buffers, burnishers, carpet extractors, and other cleaning tools — even janitorial carts.

Cleaning and Noise Reduction

As the janitor industry continues to embrace green cleaning, equipment manufacturers have reacted to new standards and customer preferences by developing equipment with dramatically reduced noise levels.

Today there are a variety of new cleaning tools that are quieter thanks to new, more efficient motors and other materials that have better sound-deadening qualities. These same advancements have also played a major role in the growth of day cleaning, which just a few years ago couldn't be done in many facilities due to excessive noise generated from cleaning equipment.

While vacuums were the first type of equipment that manufacturers addressed, they

have since introduced a variety of different machines with reduced sound levels. For example, one manufacturer has introduced a new generation of floor machine glazers that produce less than 60 decibels of sound, which is about the same amount of sound as a modern “quiet” dishwasher.

Cleaning equipment that produces less noise reduces worker fatigue and frustration and helps cleaning professionals perform their tasks more efficiently. This is a major component of green cleaning—reducing cleaning’s impact not only on the environment but on the people who perform the actual work.



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