

THE ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL NOISE (GENERAL)

Sound Pressure Level

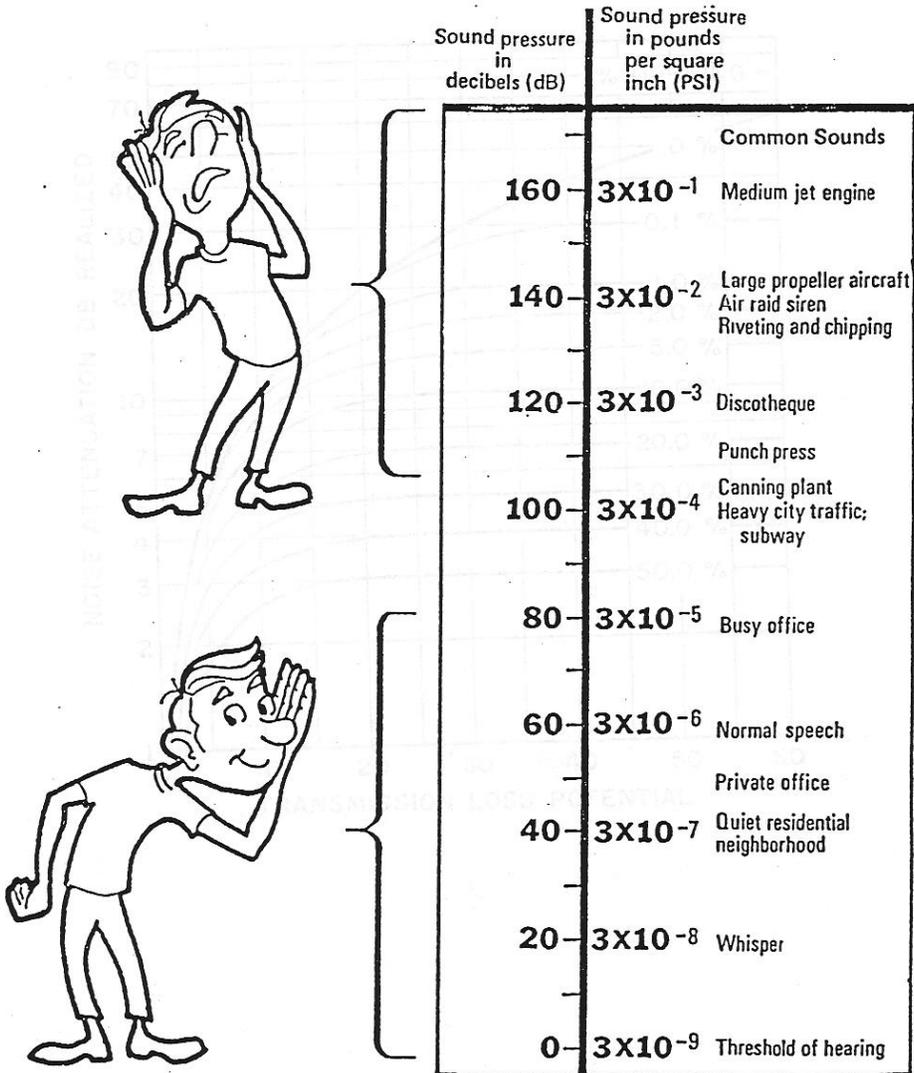
Sound pressure is initially measured in Pascal's (Pa). Humans can hear several orders of magnitude in sound pressure levels, so a more convenient scale is used. This scale is known as the decibel (dB) scale, named after Alexander Graham Bell (telephone guy). It is a base 10 logarithmic scale. When we measure pressure we typically measure the RMS sound pressure.

$$SPL = 10 \log_{10} \left[\frac{P_{RMS}^2}{P_{ref}^2} \right] = 20 \log_{10} \left[\frac{P_{RMS}}{P_{ref}} \right]$$

Where: SPL = Sound Pressure Level in dB
 P_{RMS} = Root Mean Square measured pressure (Pa)
 P_{ref} = Reference sound pressure level ($P_{ref} = 2 \times 10^{-5}$ Pa = 20 μ Pa)

This reference sound pressure level is an internationally agreed upon value. It represents the threshold of human hearing for "typical" people based on numerous testing. It is possible to have a threshold which is lower than 20 μ Pa which will result in negative dB levels. As such, zero dB does not mean there is no sound!

In general, a difference of 1 – 2 dB is the threshold for humans to notice that there has been a change in sound level. A difference of 3 dB (factor of 2 in acoustical energy) is perceptible and a change of 5 dB is strongly perceptible. A change of 10 dB is typically considered a factor of 2. This is quite remarkable when considering that 10 dB is 10-times the acoustical energy!



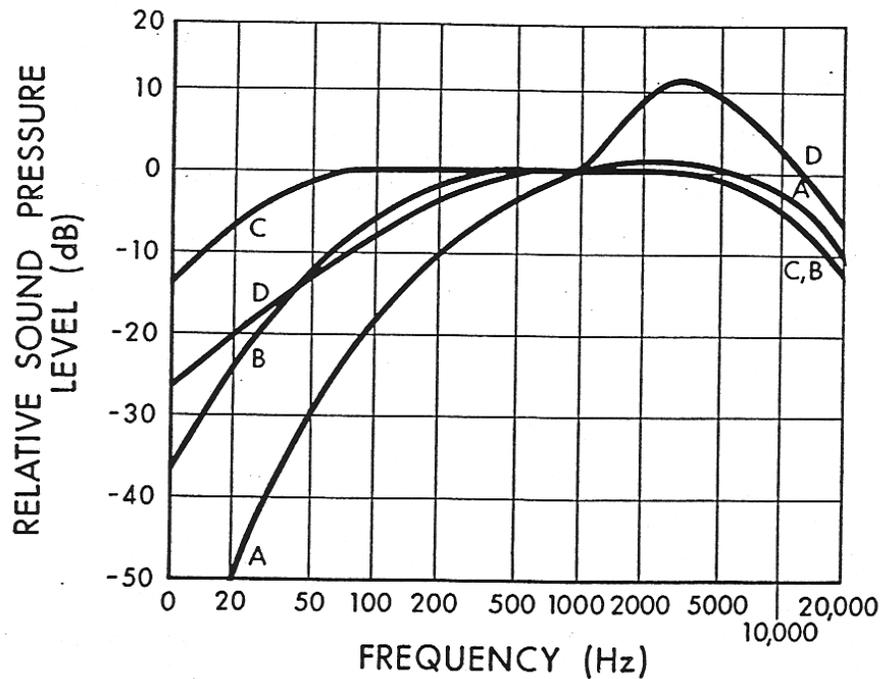
Frequency

The range of frequencies audible to the human ear ranges from approximately 20 Hz to 20 kHz. Within this range, the human ear does not hear equally at all frequencies. It is not very sensitive to low frequency sounds, is very sensitive to mid frequency sounds and is slightly less sensitive to high frequency sounds. Due to the large frequency range of human hearing, the entire spectrum is often divided into 31 bands, each known as a 1/3 octave band.

The internationally agreed upon center frequencies and upper and lower band limits for the 1/1 (whole octave) and 1/3 octave bands are as follows:

<u>Whole Octave</u>			<u>1/3 Octave</u>		
Lower Band Limit	Center Frequency	Upper Band Limit	Lower Band Limit	Center Frequency	Upper Band Limit
11	16	22	14.1	16	17.8
22	31.5	44	17.8	20	22.4
44	63	88	22.4	25	28.2
88	125	177	28.2	31.5	35.5
177	250	355	35.5	40	44.7
355	500	710	44.7	50	56.2
710	1000	1420	56.2	63	70.8
1420	2000	2840	70.8	80	89.1
2840	4000	5680	89.1	100	112
5680	8000	11360	112	125	141
11360	16000	22720	141	160	178
			178	200	224
			224	250	282
			282	315	355
			355	400	447
			447	500	562
			562	630	708
			708	800	891
			891	1000	1122
			1122	1250	1413
			1413	1600	1778
			1778	2000	2239
			2239	2500	2818
			2818	3150	3548
			3548	4000	4467
			4467	5000	5623
			5623	6300	7079
			7079	8000	8913
			8913	10000	11220
			11220	12500	14130
			14130	16000	17780
			17780	20000	22390

Human hearing is most sensitive at approximately 3500 Hz which corresponds to the ¼ wavelength of the ear canal (approximately 2.5 cm). Because of this range of sensitivity to various frequencies, we typically apply various weighting networks to the broadband measured sound to more appropriately account for the way humans hear. By default, the most common weighting network used is the so-called “A-weighting”. It can be seen in the figure that the low frequency sounds are reduced significantly with the A-weighting.



Combination of Sounds

When combining multiple sound sources the general equation is:

$$\Sigma SPL_n = 10 \log_{10} \left[\sum_{i=1}^n 10^{\frac{SPL_i}{10}} \right]$$

Examples:

- Two sources of 50 dB each add together to result in 53 dB.
- Three sources of 50 dB each add together to result in 55 dB.
- Ten sources of 50 dB each add together to result in 60 dB.
- One source of 50 dB added to another source of 40 dB results in 50.4 dB

It can be seen that, if multiple similar sources exist, removing or reducing only one source will have little effect.

Sound Level Measurements

Over the years a number of methods for measuring and describing environmental noise have been developed. The most widely used and accepted is the concept of the Energy Equivalent Sound Level (L_{eq}) which was developed in the US (1970's) to characterize noise levels near US Air-force bases. This is the level of a steady state sound which, for a given period of time, would contain the same energy as the time varying sound. The concept is that the same amount of annoyance occurs from a sound having a high level for a short period of time as from a sound at a lower level for a longer period of time.

The L_{eq} is defined as:

$$L_{eq} = 10 \log_{10} \left[\frac{1}{T} \int_0^T 10^{\frac{dB}{10}} dT \right] = 10 \log_{10} \left[\frac{1}{T} \int_0^T \frac{P^2}{P_{ref}^2} dT \right]$$

We must specify the time period over which to measure the sound. i.e. 1-second, 10-seconds, 15-seconds, 1-minute, 1-day, etc. **An L_{eq} is meaningless if there is no time period associated.**

In general there are a few very common L_{eq} sample durations which are used in describing environmental noise measurements. These include:

- L_{eq24} - Measured over a 24-hour period
- $L_{eqNight}$ - Measured over the night-time (typically 22:00 – 07:00)
- L_{eqDay} - Measured over the day-time (typically 07:00 – 22:00)
- L_{DN} - Same as L_{eq24} with a 10 dB penalty added to the night-time

Statistical Descriptor

Another method of conveying long term noise levels utilizes statistical descriptors. These are calculated from a cumulative distribution of the sound levels over the entire measurement duration and then determining the sound level at xx % of the time.

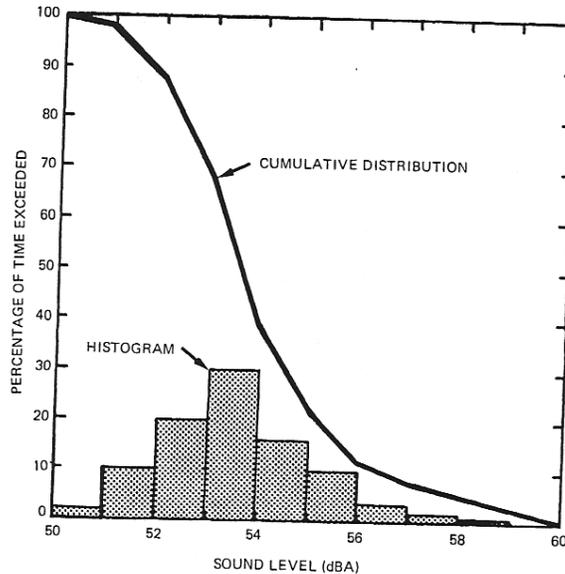


Figure 16.6 Statistically processed community noise showing histogram and cumulative distribution of A weighted sound levels.

Industrial Noise Control, Lewis Bell, Marcel Dekker, Inc. 1994

The most common statistical descriptors are:

- L_{\min} - minimum sound level measured
- L_{01} - sound level that was exceeded only 1% of the time
- L_{10} - sound level that was exceeded only 10% of the time.
 - Good measure of intermittent or intrusive noise
 - Good measure of Traffic Noise
- L_{50} - sound level that was exceeded 50% of the time (arithmetic average)
 - Good to compare to L_{eq} to determine steadiness of noise
- L_{90} - sound level that was exceeded 90% of the time
 - Good indicator of typical “ambient” noise levels
- L_{99} - sound level that was exceeded 99% of the time
- L_{\max} - maximum sound level measured

These descriptors can be used to provide a more detailed analysis of the varying noise climate:

- If there is a large difference between the L_{eq} and the L_{50} (L_{eq} can never be any lower than the L_{50}) then it can be surmised that one or more short duration, high level sound(s) occurred during the time period.
- If the gap between the L_{10} and L_{90} is relatively small (less than 15 – 20 dBA) then it can be surmised that the noise climate was relatively steady.

Sound Propagation

In order to understand sound propagation, the nature of the source must first be discussed. In general, there are three types of sources. These are known as ‘point’, ‘line’, and ‘area’. This discussion will concentrate on point and line sources since area sources are much more complex and can usually be approximated by point sources at large distances.

Point Source

As sound radiates from a point source, it dissipates through geometric spreading. The basic relationship between the sound levels at two distances from a point source is:

$$\therefore SPL_1 - SPL_2 = 20 \log_{10} \left(\frac{r_2}{r_1} \right)$$

Where: SPL_1 = sound pressure level at location 1, SPL_2 = sound pressure level at location 2
 r_1 = distance from source to location 1, r_2 = distance from source to location 2

Thus, the reduction in sound pressure level for a point source radiating in a free field is **6 dB per doubling of distance**. This relationship is independent of reflectivity factors provided they are always present. Note that this only considers geometric spreading and does not take into account atmospheric effects. Point sources still have some physical dimension associated with them, and typically do not radiate sound equally in all directions in all frequencies. The directionality of a source is also highly dependent on frequency. As frequency increases, directionality increases.

Examples (note no atmospheric absorption):

- A point source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 44 dB at 200m.
- A point source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 40.5 dB at 300m.
- A point source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 38 dB at 400m.
- A point source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 30 dB at 1000m.

Line Source

A line source is similar to a point source in that it dissipates through geometric spreading. The difference is that a line source is equivalent to a long line of many point sources. The basic relationship between the sound levels at two distances from a line source is:

$$SPL_1 - SPL_2 = 10 \log_{10} \left(\frac{r_2}{r_1} \right)$$

The difference from the point source is that the ‘20’ term in front of the ‘log’ is now only 10. Thus, the reduction in sound pressure level for a line source radiating in a free field is **3 dB per doubling of distance**.

Examples (note no atmospheric absorption):

- A line source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 47 dB at 200m.
- A line source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 45 dB at 300m.
- A line source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 44 dB at 400m.
- A line source measuring 50 dB at 100m will be 40 dB at 1000m.

Atmospheric Absorption

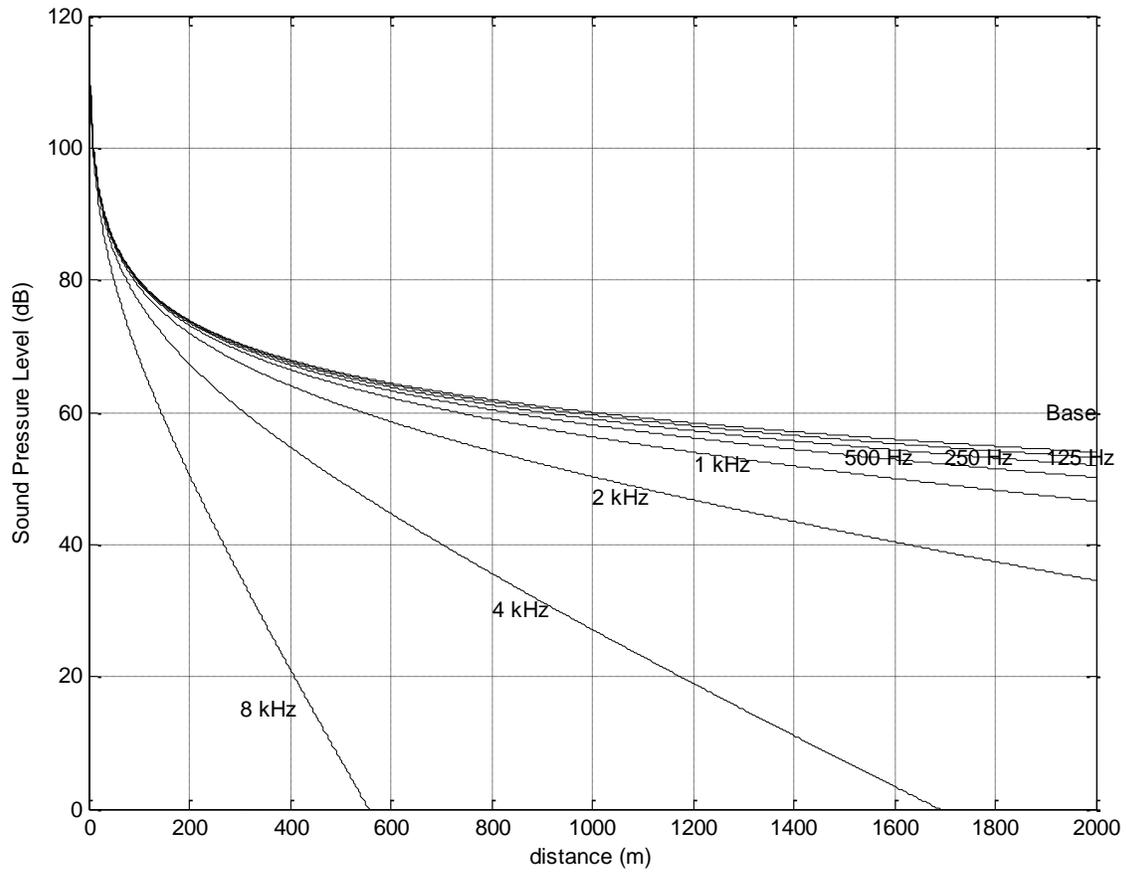
As sound transmits through a medium, there is an attenuation (or dissipation of acoustic energy) which can be attributed to three mechanisms:

- 1) **Viscous Effects** - Dissipation of acoustic energy due to fluid friction which results in thermodynamically irreversible propagation of sound.
- 2) **Heat Conduction Effects** - Heat transfer between high and low temperature regions in the wave which result in non-adiabatic propagation of the sound.
- 3) **Inter Molecular Energy Interchanges** - Molecular energy relaxation effects which result in a time lag between changes in translational kinetic energy and the energy associated with rotation and vibration of the molecules.

The following table illustrates the attenuation coefficient of sound at standard pressure (101.325 kPa) in units of dB/100m.

Temperature °C	Relative Humidity (%)	Frequency (Hz)					
		125	250	500	1000	2000	4000
30	20	0.06	0.18	0.37	0.64	1.40	4.40
	50	0.03	0.10	0.33	0.75	1.30	2.50
	90	0.02	0.06	0.24	0.70	1.50	2.60
20	20	0.07	0.15	0.27	0.62	1.90	6.70
	50	0.04	0.12	0.28	0.50	1.00	2.80
	90	0.02	0.08	0.26	0.56	0.99	2.10
10	20	0.06	0.11	0.29	0.94	3.20	9.00
	50	0.04	0.11	0.20	0.41	1.20	4.20
	90	0.03	0.10	0.21	0.38	0.81	2.50
0	20	0.05	0.15	0.50	1.60	3.70	5.70
	50	0.04	0.08	0.19	0.60	2.10	6.70
	90	0.03	0.08	0.15	0.36	1.10	4.10

- As frequency increases, absorption tends to increase
- As Relative Humidity increases, absorption tends to decrease
- There is no direct relationship between absorption and temperature
- **The net result of atmospheric absorption is to modify the sound propagation of a point source from 6 dB/doubling-of-distance to approximately 7 – 8 dB/doubling-of-distance (based on anecdotal experience)**



Atmospheric Absorption at 10°C and 70% RH

Meteorological Effects

There are many meteorological factors which can affect how sound propagates over large distances. These various phenomena must be considered when trying to determine the relative impact of a noise source either after installation or during the design stage.

Wind

- Can greatly alter the noise climate away from a source depending on direction
- Sound levels downwind from a source can be increased due to refraction of sound back down towards the surface. This is due to the generally higher velocities as altitude increases.
- Sound levels upwind from a source can be decreased due to a “bending” of the sound away from the earth’s surface.
- Sound level differences of ± 10 dB are possible depending on severity of wind and distance from source.
- Sound levels crosswind are generally not disturbed by an appreciable amount
- Wind tends to generate its own noise, however, and can provide a high degree of masking relative to a noise source of particular interest.

Temperature

- Temperature effects can be similar to wind effects
- Typically, the temperature is warmer at ground level than it is at higher elevations.
- If there is a very large difference between the ground temperature (very warm) and the air aloft (only a few hundred meters) then the transmitted sound refracts upward due to the changing speed of sound.
- If the air aloft is warmer than the ground temperature (known as an *inversion*) the resulting higher speed of sound aloft tends to refract the transmitted sound back down towards the ground. This essentially works on Snell’s law of reflection and refraction.
- Temperature inversions typically happen early in the morning and are most common over large bodies of water or across river valleys.
- Sound level differences of ± 10 dB are possible depending on gradient of temperature and distance from source.

Rain

- Rain does not affect sound propagation by an appreciable amount unless it is very heavy
- The larger concern is the noise generated by the rain itself. A heavy rain striking the ground can cause a significant amount of highly broadband noise. The amount of noise generated is difficult to predict.
- Rain can also affect the output of various noise sources such as vehicle traffic.

Summary

- In general, these wind and temperature effects are difficult to predict
- Empirical models (based on measured data) have been generated to attempt to account for these effects.
- Environmental noise measurements must be conducted with these effects in mind. Sometimes it is desired to have completely calm conditions, other times a “worst case” of downwind noise levels are desired.

Topographical Effects

Similar to the various atmospheric effects outlined in the previous section, the effect of various geographical and vegetative factors must also be considered when examining the propagation of noise over large distances.

Topography

- One of the most important factors in sound propagation.
- Can provide a natural barrier between source and receiver (i.e. if berm or hill in between).
- Can provide a natural amplifier between source and receiver (i.e. large valley in between or hard reflective surface in between).
- Must look at location of topographical features relative to source and receiver to determine importance (i.e. small berm 1km away from source and 1km away from receiver will make negligible impact).

Grass

- Can be an effective absorber due to large area covered
- Only effective at low height above ground. Does not affect sound transmitted direct from source to receiver if there is line of sight.
- Typically less absorption than atmospheric absorption when there is line of sight.
- Approximate rule of thumb based on empirical data is:

$$A_g = 18 \log_{10}(f) - 31 \quad (\text{dB}/100\text{m})$$

Where: A_g is the absorption amount

Trees

- Provide absorption due to foliage
- Deciduous trees are essentially ineffective in the winter
- Absorption depends heavily on density and height of trees
- No data found on absorption of various kinds of trees
- Large spans of trees are required to obtain even minor amounts of sound reduction
- In many cases, trees can provide an effective visual barrier, even if the noise attenuation is negligible.



NOTE — $d_t = d_1 + d_2$

For calculating d_1 and d_2 , the curved path radius may be assumed to be 5 km.

Figure A.1 — Attenuation due to propagation through foliage increases linearly with propagation distance d_t through the foliage

Table A.1 — Attenuation of an octave band of noise due to propagation a distance d_t through dense foliage

Propagation distance d_t m	Nominal midband frequency Hz							
	63	125	250	500	1 000	2 000	4 000	8 000
$10 \leq d_t \leq 20$	Attenuation, dB: 0 0		1	1	1	1	2	3
$20 \leq d_t \leq 200$	Attenuation, dB/m: 0.02 0.03		0.04	0.05	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.12

Tree/Foliage attenuation from ISO 9613-2:1996

Bodies of Water

- Large bodies of water can provide the opposite effect to grass and trees.
- Reflections caused by small incidence angles (grazing) can result in larger sound levels at great distances (increased reflectivity, Q).
- Typically air temperatures are warmer high aloft since air temperatures near water surface tend to be more constant. Result is a high probability of temperature inversion.
- Sound levels can “carry” much further.

Snow

- Covers the ground for approximately 1/2 of the year in northern climates.
- Can act as an absorber or reflector (and varying degrees in between).
- Freshly fallen snow can be quite absorptive.
- Snow which has been sitting for a while and hard packed due to wind can be quite reflective.
- Falling snow can be more absorptive than rain, but does not tend to produce its own noise.
- Snow can cover grass which might have provided some means of absorption.
- Typically sound propagates with less impedance in winter due to hard snow on ground and no foliage on trees/shrubs.

SOUND LEVELS OF FAMILIAR NOISE SOURCES

Used with Permission Obtained from the AER Directive 038 User Guide (February 2007)

Source¹	Sound Level (dBA)
—	
Bedroom of a country home	30
Soft whisper at 1.5 m	30
Quiet office or living room	40
Moderate rainfall	50
Inside average urban home	50
Quiet street	50
Normal conversation at 1 m	60
Noisy office	60
Noisy restaurant	70
Highway traffic at 15 m	75
Loud singing at 1 m	75
Tractor at 15 m	78-95
Busy traffic intersection	80
Electric typewriter	80
Bus or heavy truck at 15 m	88-94
Jackhammer	88-98
Loud shout	90
Freight train at 15 m	95
Modified motorcycle	95
Jet taking off at 600 m	100
Amplified rock music	110
Jet taking off at 60 m	120
Air-raid siren	130

¹ Cottrell, Tom, 1980, *Noise in Alberta*, Table 1, p.8, ECA80 - 16/1B4 (Edmonton: Environment Council of Alberta).

SOUND LEVELS GENERATED BY COMMON APPLIANCES

Used with Permission Obtained from the AER Directive 038 User Guide (February 2007)

Source²	Sound level at 3 feet (dBA)
Freezer	38-45
Refrigerator	34-53
Electric heater	47
Hair clipper	50
Electric toothbrush	48-57
Humidifier	41-54
Clothes dryer	51-65
Air conditioner	50-67
Electric shaver	47-68
Water faucet	62
Hair dryer	58-64
Clothes washer	48-73
Dishwasher	59-71
Electric can opener	60-70
Food mixer	59-75
Electric knife	65-75
Electric knife sharpener	72
Sewing machine	70-74
Vacuum cleaner	65-80
Food blender	65-85
Coffee mill	75-79
Food waste disposer	69-90
Edger and trimmer	81
Home shop tools	64-95
Hedge clippers	85
Electric lawn mower	80-90

² Reif, Z. F., and Vermeulen, P. J., 1979, "Noise from domestic appliances, construction, and industry," Table 1, p.166, in Jones, H. W., ed., *Noise in the Human Environment*, vol. 2, ECA79-SP/1 (Edmonton: Environment Council of Alberta).