

I became knowledgeable concerning issues of aircraft noise in the process of creating a web site devoted to the topic (<http://www.scican.net/~sos/index.html>), programming a jet noise simulator to study the problem (<http://www.scican.net/~sos/jetNoise.html>), and observing and interviewing citizens around IND airport in my role of professor of sociology at Indiana University. Accordingly, I am aware of crucial issues that must be addressed in the emerging FAA Aviation Noise Abatement Policy. In this message, I emphasize just matters that are most important in the local situation around IND airport. Additional issues are of great significance elsewhere.

It is essential that night-time flights be controlled more effectively than at present to minimize noise disturbances; and a nationwide curfew is a reasonable option. The predicament of people living adjacent to an airport is most poignant. I interviewed an elderly couple living beyond the 65 dBA DNL boundary at IND who cannot hear the late news or talk shows because of jet warm-up noise from cargo jets, and who are unable to sell their property because of noise depreciation. The problem is not limited to people adjacent to airports, however. I have measured the noise of jets flying at 3:00 to 4:00 a.m. over residences 30 miles from the airport, and I have obtained readings in excess of 65 decibels against a background noise level of less than 45 decibels.

It also is essential that noise limits on each individual aircraft be stringently maintained. Experimenting with the jet noise simulator that I created clearly reveals that reducing each aircraft's individual level of noise is by far the most effective method of reducing noise disturbance from airplanes. The current Stage 3 noise standards must be maintained, or made more stringent, and rules should be instituted to prevent fudging with regard to these standards. Noise limits should be instituted for small aircraft as well as for those over 75,000 pounds to deal with increasingly frequent flights by small craft.

UNDER NO CONDITION should supersonic flights, with their sonic booms, be permitted anywhere close to human habitations, night or day. Permitting daily supersonic flights over inhabited areas would create environmental havoc and severe human repercussions.

Control of aircraft noise must be returned to local governments to some degree at least. For example, the FAA might define official classes of airports with different levels of noise and other pollution. It then would be entirely up to state governments to choose the class for each regional airport within their boundaries.

Setting national policy on flight noise is the most effective -- in fact the only effective way to control this growing environmental problem. As late as 1998 the air industry was doing little on its own to reduce noise. The industry significantly reduced noise pollution from jets only as the Stage 3 requirements phased in. Thus it is important for Americans' quality of life and for the health of our citizenry to establish legal limits on aircraft noise for the future.