

## **Manual of European Environmental Policy**

The following pages are a section from the Manual of European Environmental Policy written by the Institute for European Environmental Policy.

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This section is the text of the Manual as published in 2012. It is therefore important to note the following:

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# Overview of EU policy: Noise

For a long time, Community legislation on noise focused on limiting noise from products, rather than on setting standards for ambient background noise. In this respect, legislation to combat noise from transport has set noise standards for vehicles, such as cars, [buses, lorries and trains \(including tyres\)](#); [motorcycles](#); [tractors](#); and [aircraft](#). Similarly, there is Community legislation addressing noise from other products, including [construction equipment](#); lawnmowers; and [household appliances](#). Community action on noise was originally intended to avoid technical barriers to trade caused by differing standards applied in the Member States for noisy products and equipment. The only early example of a Directive not specifically related to product standards was Directive 86/188/EEC, which sought to limit [noise in the workplace](#). This was a ‘daughter’ Directive of Directive 80/1107/EEC on the protection of workers from various risks at work.

The first initiative to attempt to move Community policy beyond product standards came in the second Environmental Action Programme (1977), which proposed new measures such as the definition of quality objectives, specific regulations for sensitive areas and noise-related charges. But despite a further commitment in the Fifth Environmental Action Programme to tackle urban noise problems, it was not until the end of 1996 that the Commission issued a Green Paper (COM(96)540) setting out possible options for future action to reduce noise pollution. This document argued that existing policies had not resulted in significant improvements in noise exposure levels, particularly from road traffic, and sought to justify additional EU action. One of the Commission's principal concerns was that a number of Member States were planning to introduce national legislation to limit noise from certain types of outdoor equipment which could threaten the integrity of the single market. As a result the Commission proposed the framework Directive [for outdoor equipment](#) which was adopted in 2000.

The Commission decided against proposing the introduction of general noise quality standards, but initiated a work programme towards the end of 1998 to develop common assessment methods for noise. The culmination of this work was the publication of the proposal for a Directive on the [assessment and management of noise](#), which was adopted in July 2002 as Directive 2002/49/EC. This represented a significant development in Community noise policy whereby Member States would be required to assess ambient noise levels and monitor these (though without requirements to meet specific noise objectives). Article 7 of the Sixth Environmental Action Programme (see section on the [Sixth Environmental Action Programme and the Thematic Strategies](#)) included an objective of ‘substantially reducing the number of people regularly affected by long-term average levels of noise, in particular from traffic’. However little further legislative development has occurred since the adoption of the Programme.

The Green Paper also put forward some quite specific proposals in the transport sector. Among these were the development of additional legislation on roadworthiness tests for cars; an investigation into the possibility of setting emission limit values to combat noise from trains; and a Communication setting out a framework for measuring noise around airports. The latter was originally addressed by the so-called hushkits Regulation, but this has since been replaced by a Directive that sets out an [airport-specific approach](#). In October 2000, the Commission published a proposal addressing emissions and noise from petrol and diesel engines intended for use in recreational craft and personal watercraft ([COM\(2000\)639](#)).

On 8 July 2008, as part of the Greening Transport Package, the Commission published a Communication ([COM\(2008\)432](#)) on rail noise abatement measures addressing the existing fleet. The Commission proposed that noise emissions from freight trains should be curbed by retrofitting freight wagons with low-noise brakes. This was deemed to be the most cost-effective method and therefore one which would not jeopardize the competitiveness of rail freight. Retrofitting should in principle include all European freight wagons with an annual mileage of over 10,000 km and a remaining life expectancy of at least five years. The target date for the completion of retrofitting would be 2015. The Commission also stated its intention to propose legal requirements for the implementation of noise-differentiated track access charges, in the course of the recast of Directive 2001/14/EC on the allocation of railway infrastructure capacity and the levying of charges for the use of railway infrastructure and safety certification.

In December 2011, the Commission introduced a new package entitled 'Better Airports' consisting of three proposed Regulations, one of which addresses noise-related operating restrictions at airports. The proposal, which if adopted would replace the existing Directive on this issue, seeks to harmonise the operating restrictions with the rules of the International Civil Aviation Organisation.