



It is the declared public policy of the District to reduce the ambient noise level in the District to promote public health, safety, welfare and the peace and quiet of the inhabitants of the District, and to facilitate the enjoyment of the natural attraction of the District. ([DCMR 20, Sec. 2700.1](#))

We are the [DC Harmony Coalition](#), a diverse community of students, parents, teachers, office workers, business owners, and residents who are looking for ways to peacefully co-exist with the city's street performers.

- We wholeheartedly embrace and celebrate the District's cultural diversity, and we will continue to unflinchingly defend all citizens' First Amendment rights to free speech and freedom of assembly.
- We enthusiastically support and encourage DC's street performers since they are an important reason that DC has become one of the world's most dynamic and vibrant cities. And we respect the rights of all street performers to express themselves and to make a living.

We seek **to work together** to find a reasonable, harmonious balance for the shared benefit of all community members so that we can protect the health and safety of all DC citizens.

- **DC Harmony** seeks to follow [examples of other cities](#) like Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York that have found common ground by developing fair, workable, and enforceable legislation that ensures safe volume levels in public spaces.
- We **never have**, and we **never will, ask to mute street artists**. We only ask that their volume be at a safe and healthy level for everyone in the community – residents, workers, visitors, law enforcement officers, and all our District friends and neighbors.

The Issue

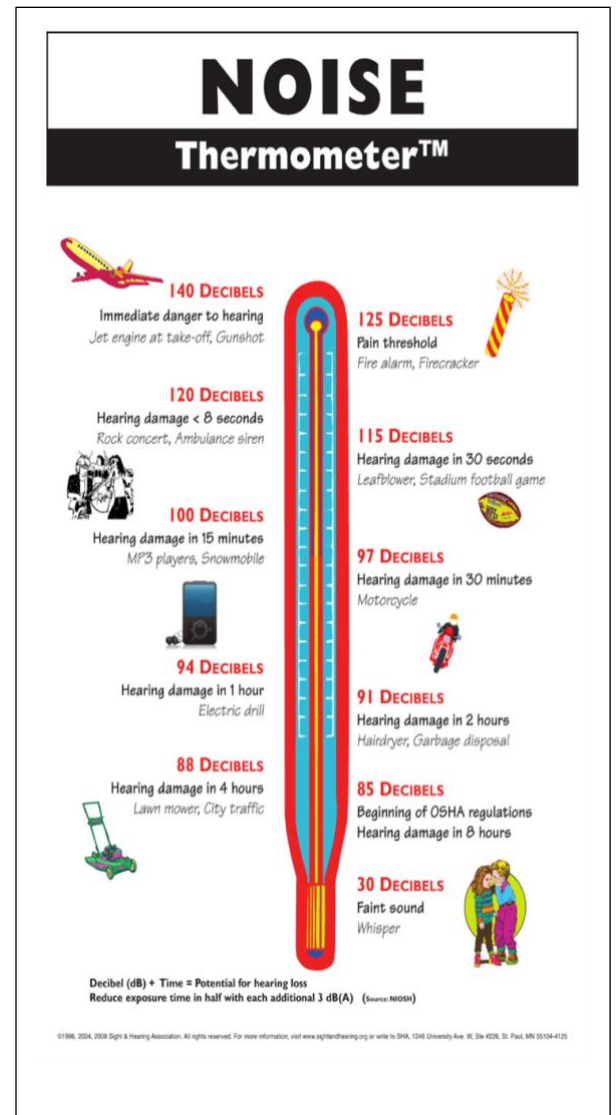
The only issue is excess volume of sound in public spaces. Some street artists are playing or amplifying the volume of their music at well over 90dB (equivalent to a chainsaw) and often well beyond 100dB (equivalent to a bulldozer). The street artists are performing at these volume levels up to 8 to 10 hours almost every day of the week. This exposes residents and office workers to unhealthy sound levels for hours at a stretch on the street and inside buildings. The DC Harmony Coalition has documented hundreds of incidents [where residents and visitors have been directly and repeatedly harmed by excessive volume](#).

Real & Growing Public Health Threat

- Public health officials are coming to grips with the dangers of continuous elevated sound volumes. This May 13, 2019 issue of the **New Yorker** explores sound pollution as "[the next big public-health crisis.](#)"
- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) states hearing damage is possible after **two hours** of exposure to [80-85 decibels](#), which is equivalent to standing next to an alarm clock, a vacuum, or being inside a noisy restaurant.
- The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) warns that prolonged exposure to elevated sound can cause tinnitus, sleep disturbance, ischemic heart disease, obesity, diabetes, adverse birth outcomes, migraine headaches, and cognitive impairment in children. **The National Institute for Health (NIH)** recommends "avoiding sounds that are too loud, too close, or last too long."
- **Research shows** that intermittent exposure to loud sounds can lead to higher long-term stress hormone levels, hypertension, anxiety, depression, [hyperacusis](#), and [misophonia](#).

Counterproductive for Everyone: Employers, Employees, Students, Residents, and Artists

- Excessive volumes prevent businesses from functioning, impacting economic viability. Trade associations cannot conduct meetings; psychotherapy sessions are interrupted; one hotel has offered guests white noise machines. Homes and office buildings (i.e. Terrell building at 7th and F Street, NW) are being vacated or sold because of excessive street performer volume. Patrons and servers at Clyde's and other restaurants complain about excessive volume.
- Health care professionals, providers, and patients have expressed their discomfort and consternation. For instance, George Washington Hospital has expressed concern about the welfare of its patients, nurses, and doctors in its most sensitive units, including the neonatal intensive care unit, intensive care, cardiac, MED Surge, and oncology, which are located on the "south side of the hospital and are directly impacted."
- Residents who telework cannot concentrate due to the high-volume; they cannot hold conference calls or meet with clients/colleagues in their home offices. Blind residents are unable to hear their audio-assisted devices over the excessive sound of street performers. Babies or adults dealing with illnesses are unable to rest or sleep during the day.



- Students of all ages can't concentrate on homework or prepare for tests. Research shows that the [younger students are most impaired](#) by excessive sounds in tasks involving speech perception and listening comprehension. Non-auditory tasks such as short-term memory, reading and writing are also impaired by excessive sound volume.

Efforts to Resolve Excessive Volume Levels

- For several years, residents were able to work with street performers to lower the volume to reasonable levels acceptable to all. However, over the past three to four years, as the volume has continually increased, residents, workers, and business owners have pursued all peaceful and lawful remedies available to us without relief.
- We have asked the city, through MPD and DCRA to enforce existing laws when the volume exceeds established decibels. **Either inadequate, conflicting, or complex regulations, city policy, or lack of resources prevents MPD and DCRA from enforcing allowable reasonable volume limits.** When they are enforced, the offender will reduce the volume when given a verbal warning; soon after the official leaves, the volume is increased often louder than before.
- Those impacted have documented the problem's severity by collecting testimony from hundreds of residents and local businesses (see, for example, public hearings held on [October 4, 2018, and July 2, 2018](#)), participated in face-to-face meetings and field tests with street performers, and attended roundtables and hearings to try and find common ground.

The Path to Common Ground: Where We All Agree

The [DC Harmony Coalition](#) is heartened by the fact that there is already substantial agreement amongst all interest groups. We look forward to continued dialogue with all stakeholders to build on these agreements to find a way forward. We want to part of the solution. We don't want to be part of the problem.

From our perspective, we see the following areas of agreement:

- Don't mute DC!
- Replace the term "Noise" with "Sound" or "Volume" in the title and body of any legislation.
- Apply sound limits in all residential areas in residential and commercial zones.
- Establish reasonable and workable enforcement measures, such as issuing verbal warnings for new offenders, providing best practice resources, and levying minimal, but escalating fines for successive infractions.

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