



## PRESS RELEASE

### EU announces plan to make cars and lorries quieter

**Wednesday, May 25, 2011** - The European Commission has announced plans to tighten noise limits for cars, lorries and buses with a proposal expected within weeks and by September at the latest. Environmental and health organisations have welcomed the Commission's announcement but called for standards that go much further towards World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations for avoiding dangerous impacts on health from traffic noise pollution.

Philippe Jean, acting director of the European Commission's Enterprise Department, told a conference organised by Transport & Environment (T&E), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the Health and Environment Alliance (Heal) (1) that the Commission plans to cut noise emissions from cars by 4 decibels and from lorries by 3 decibels. The new limits would come into force within four years of a new Vehicle Noise Directive being agreed, he said.

The Commission's announcement follows publication of an EU-funded study by consultant TNO which says implementing vehicle noise limits that halve traffic noise would bring about benefits to society outweighing the costs of introducing quieter vehicles by a factor of twenty to one. (2)

According to a recent study by the WHO (3), 1.8% of heart attacks in high income European countries can be attributed to traffic noise levels higher than 60dB. Cardiovascular disease is the largest cause of death in the EU and accounts for approximately 10% of national healthcare budgets. A 2008 report by consultants CE for T&E (4) found that noise from rail and road transport is linked to 50,000 fatal heart attacks every year in Europe and 200,000 cases of cardio-vascular disease.

According to Jean, the new noise limits would be introduced in two stages: car limits, which are currently set at 74 decibels, would be reduced to 72 decibels within two years and to 70 within four years. Lorry limits would have to be lowered by 1 decibel within two years and by a further 2 within four years, he said. The Commission is also expected to announce a new test method, to better reflect the real world noise emissions of vehicles.

Environmental and health groups have urged the European Commission to set more stringent noise reduction standards at least 6 decibels lower than today. The decibel scale is logarithmic; a reduction in car noise emissions of 6 decibels would reduce the noise level of an individual vehicle by three-quarters but it would take many years of fleet renewal for overall traffic noise to be reduced. Many cars sold today already meet the

standard recommended by environmental and health groups, including conventional internal combustion engine vehicles, not just hybrids and electric cars.

Nina Renshaw, deputy director of Transport & Environment said: "The Commission has finally admitted that current vehicle noise legislation has blatantly failed to tackle the problem; tightening these limits was long overdue. If car manufacturers can already meet the standards with existing technology, there is no excuse for further delay. Furthermore, The Commission must improve the testing process to ensure noise tests for heavy vehicles on the test bench reflect what happens in the real world. Cutting noise emissions on paper only is not an option."

Anne Stauffer, director of Heal, said: "Traffic noise in cities is an important public health issue. As well as the evidence of increased heart attacks as a result of exposure to environmental noise, evidence shows noise pushes up rates of stroke, especially in older people, and affects children's ability to learn. New data on the harm to health from noise are emerging all the time. We would like to see much greater awareness raising with medical professionals and decision makers and ambitious legislative proposals to reduce exposure."

## Footnotes

- 1) 'Quiet please - Better health through strong EU regulation of road and rail traffic noise', published today: <http://tinyurl.com/3ud525s>
- 2) [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/automotive/files/projects/report-venoliva\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/automotive/files/projects/report-venoliva_en.pdf)
- 3) [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/136466/Burden\\_of\\_disease.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/136466/Burden_of_disease.pdf)
- 4) [http://www.transportenvironment.org/Publications/prep\\_hand\\_out/lid:494](http://www.transportenvironment.org/Publications/prep_hand_out/lid:494)