

Date 4 August 2010

Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Secretary of State for the Home Dept
Home Office
Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State

Tackling 'nuisance' behaviour

Environmental Protection UK is the environmental protection charity supported by pollution control professionals. Our members include local authority officers who manage noise problems. We read with interest your recent speech on anti social behaviour "Moving beyond the ASBO" (July 28), and would like to raise a number of issues around this, introduce you to our work in this area and to offer our support in developing practical solutions to problems relating to noise in particular. More complaints (over 170,000 in 2008/9) are made to local authorities about noise than about any other issue and it is also a frequent feature of MPs' postbags.

In your speech you used the word nuisance. As you will know the concept of nuisance has been enshrined in UK legislation for decades as 'an unlawful interference with a person's use or enjoyment of land'. Nuisance problems that many people are subject to – specifically noise, litter, light, and odour – are actionable in laws enacted under both Conservative and Labour governments. Environmental Protection UK have long standing experience of working to educate the public to take responsibility and promote more consideration of noise issues, notably during our annual Noise Action Week (23 – 27 May 2011) which promotes practical solutions to everyday noise problems. While some neighbour noise is undoubtedly a result of selfish behaviour, it is also frequently due to poor design in flat conversions, poor sound insulation in older housing and inadequate enforcement of insulation standards in newer properties – all of which can create or exacerbate problems – and retrofitting is often beyond the means of residents. For these reasons, it is essential that we retain the means to manage these problems through professional intervention. Advice, warnings and or raising awareness of a problem can frequently resolve it – and where this is not the case the nuisance laws can be enforced.

Local authority noise officers are dedicated to resolving noise complaints and working to improve community relations. In Government, the noise team in Defra supports them and ensures regulation remains appropriate and effective, as do professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and voluntary bodies such as ourselves. We were pleased to see that the coalition government has endorsed the Noise Policy

Statement England, published in March this year, which aims 'to promote good health and a good quality of life through the management of noise within the context of Government policy on sustainable development'. We look forward to seeing that support put into practice through a consistent approach across departments that will underpin the work of local authorities, housing providers, the Police and other community professionals towards cleaner, quieter, healthier neighbourhoods.

We look for your reassurance that the systems in place that are working to maintain a healthy noise climate in our neighbourhoods will not be removed. In your speech you stated that you plan to assist local authorities with a toolkit. This would be welcome, and we would like to offer the input of our members in putting this together, if this would be helpful.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours faithfully

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