

Appendix 7.1

Noise Units

Decibels (dB)

Noise can be defined as unwanted sound. Sound in air can be considered as the propagation of energy through the air in the form of oscillatory changes in pressure. The size of the pressure changes in acoustic waves is quantified on a logarithmic decibel (dB) scale firstly because the range of audible sound pressures is very great, and secondly because the loudness function of the human auditory system is approximately logarithmic.

The dynamic range of the auditory system is generally taken to be 0 dB to 140 dB. Generally, the addition of noise from two sources producing the same sound pressure level, will lead to an increase in sound pressure level of 3 dB. A 3 dB noise change is generally considered to be just noticeable, a 5 dB change is generally considered to be clearly discernible and a 10 dB change is generally accepted as leading to the subjective impression of a doubling or halving of loudness.

A-Weighting

The bandwidth of the frequency response of the ear is usually taken to be from about 18 Hz to 18,000 Hz. The auditory system is not equally sensitive throughout this frequency range. This is taken into account when making acoustic measurements by the use of A-weighting, a filter circuit which has a frequency response similar to the human auditory system. All the measurement results referred to in this report are A-weighted.

Units Used to Describe Time-Varying Noise Sources (L_{Aeq} , L_{A10} , L_{A90} and L_{Amax})

Instantaneous A-weighted sound pressure level is not generally considered as an adequate indicator of subjective response to noise because levels of noise usually vary with time.

For many types of noise the Equivalent Continuous A-Weighted Sound Pressure Level ($L_{Aeq,T}$) is used as the basis of determining community response. The $L_{Aeq,T}$ is defined as the A-weighted sound pressure level of the steady sound which contains the same acoustic energy as the noise being assessed over a specific time period, T.

The L_{A10} is the noise level exceeded for 10% of the measurement period. It has been used in the UK for the assessment of road traffic noise.

The L_{A90} is the noise level exceeded for 90% of the measurement period. It is generally used to quantify the background noise level, the underlying level of noise which is present even during the quieter parts of the measurement period.

The L_{Amax} is the maximum value that the A-weighted sound pressure level reaches during a measurement period. $L_{Amax F}$, or Fast, is averaged over 0.125 of a second and $L_{Amax S}$, or Slow, is averaged over 1 second.