

Legal Provisions

- Under Section 2(a) of the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981**, noise is classified as an air pollutant.
- Noise regulation is governed by the **Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000**, framed under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- These rules outline permissible noise levels, designate silence zones, and impose restrictions on loudspeakers, horns, construction equipment, and firecrackers.
- They also assign enforcement responsibilities to authorities.

Permissible Noise Limits

- The Rules define acceptable noise levels by area and time:
 - Industrial Areas: 75 dB during the day, 70 dB at night.
 - Commercial Areas: 65 dB during the day, 55 dB at night.
 - Residential Areas: 55 dB during the day, 45 dB at night.
 - Silence Zones (100 metres around hospitals, schools, and courts): 50 dB during the day, 40 dB at night.
 - Daytime is defined as 6 am to 10 pm, and nighttime as 10 pm to 6 am. These thresholds aim to protect health and ensure civic order.

The Heavy Toll of Urban Noise

- Indian towns and cities regularly face noise levels well above safe limits.
- While the WHO recommends **daytime exposure below 55 dB** and India's rules set similar thresholds, traffic corridors often cross 70 dB.
- Because noise intensity rises tenfold with every 10 dB increase, this exposure is far more damaging than it appears.
- The worst impact is borne by vulnerable groups such as street vendors, delivery workers, traffic police, and residents of informal settlements.
- For these groups, constant urban noise is not just an irritation but a daily occupational hazard that undermines health and well-being.

Why Noise Pollution Remains Unchecked

- India's noise crisis persists due to three systemic failures.
- First, **inadequate monitoring leaves policymakers blind**, as noise data remains sporadic and incomplete compared to air quality tracking.
- Second, **weak enforcement and cultural acceptance** of noisy practices prevent meaningful action.
- Third, **fragmented governance** — split between pollution boards, municipalities, and police — dilutes responsibility and limits accountability.
- As a result, symbolic steps like honking bans or festival crackdowns fail to address the deeper structural causes, leaving noise pollution an unaddressed public health crisis.

Tackling Noise Pollution: The Way Forward

- Addressing noise pollution requires **treating it on par with air and water pollution** through evidence-based, public-health-focused interventions.
- **Monitoring must be expanded with real-time sensors** and machine learning to identify sources like traffic, construction, and industry.
- Health studies should track noise exposure near schools, hospitals, and low-income areas.
- Urban planning must **integrate noise mitigation with green buffers, zoning, and sustainable mobility** measures such as electric buses and cycling.
- Governance reforms should **strengthen enforcement, ensure inter-agency coordination**, and enhance accountability.
- Finally, **community engagement is vital**—awareness campaigns and partnerships with local leaders can help shift cultural norms while ensuring inclusive solutions.

Noise as a Public Health Equity Issue

- The fight against noise pollution must prioritise equity, as **those most exposed often lack the means to shield themselves**.
- Quiet living conditions should be a universal right, not a luxury. India's experience with air pollution shows how neglect worsens harm and deepens inequality.
- Noise is already recognised as an air pollutant, but effective action demands stronger political and civic will.
- By embedding noise control into clean-air agendas, urban planning, and public health strategies, India can safeguard lives, protect vulnerable communities, and uphold the fundamental right to quiet.

Source: **IE** | **IE** | **IE**

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