

# NOISE & ANNOYANCE

## Understanding Our Impact

**PHPA and its members have always been concerned with noise. We are as helicopter pilots, however, largely insulated from the phenomenon by a variety of factors, some psychological, some physical.**

- For one thing, we know that the helicopters we fly are noisy. It has, through our training and professional work, become a “given”. Noise is noise, helicopters are helicopters, and that’s that, right?
- We view noise, in some critical regards, as a friend. But noise that is anomalous – that we’re not used to hearing in the midst of the rest of the cacophony to which we are quite used – well, that noise catches our attention super-fast. Why? Our life is at stake along with the passengers we have and possibly people on the ground. Most of the time an anomalous noise means something is not working right, something has separated from our fuselage, something in the drive train surely isn’t right, something has hit us, and / or something worse is about to happen. Anomalous noises are ones that make us stand at attention mentally, as in all synapses are “on deck – right now!”
- We fly with noise-cancelling or at least noise deadening ear “muffs”. Worse case for someone in our helicopter, he or she has ear plugs. We hear a pulsing and strong hum most of the time and, as we focus on the controls, the gauges, the terrain, safe procedures, and the comfort of our passengers, even that pulsing hum somewhat disappears into the far reaches of our minds. We’re doing our job; the noise in some regards is both comforting and ‘shut out’ of our consciousness. (That’s, of course, unless it stops!)
- Finally, although unlike those aircraft that break the sound barrier and leave their sound signature behind them, we don’t travel that fast but we travel both high enough and low enough and with enough protections for ourselves, that we may not notice the noise that we project onto the ground – and onto the houses, and onto the people – below us. For most of them, what we do is hardly routine. It is very anomalous, it may provoke fear, and to many it is disturbing at minimum and frustrating at the other end of the scale. And therein lays the issue for us as an industry, for us as operators, for us as pilots and for us as citizens: we create noise.

Not all that non-anomalous noise is bad. I recall in Vietnam, as an Infantry officer, when I heard the unmistakable whap-whap-whap of a Huey, I knew help was on the way, someone was going to take me away, or supplies were in bound. All that was good. These were “the friendlies”. And the sound of “the friendlies” was just that: a very friendly sound. I became programmed to appreciate that sound, indeed, to look forward to hearing it.

Today, the sound of a rescue helicopter – be it Coast Guard, be it Sheriff's, be it private or public medevac (we called them 'dust offs') – can be a very very welcome sound, indeed a life-saving sound.

But that same sound, in a different context, in a jam-packed urban environment, between two resonating hills, over a beautiful evening with an outdoor orchestra, loitering too long in one spot, occurring low and suddenly and in a startling manner, occurring late at night or too early in the morning ~ that same sound, especially to non-pilots can be aggravating to the point of frustration and even to the point of political action. In extremis, and of course unlawfully, this frustration can lead to physical danger to some of our public safety pilots or even civilian pilots.

Los Angeles, and the many cities that make up "greater Los Angeles", is spread out over large swaths of geography. But there are pockets and areas that are more sensitive to helicopter noise than others. Just like with the pilots: some of this sensitivity is psychological (including folks experience with noise) and some of it is physical (in the sense of noise being more apparent or seemingly exaggerated, its regularity, its seeming proximity or volume).

We call these pockets and areas "hotspots". The FAA calls them "regions of interest". An upcoming monitoring system calls them "polygons". Whatever terminology we use, these are areas that require special care when flying near, over or through. These are areas of heightened sensitivity on the ground. These are areas that PHPA has outlined in its kneeboard publication "SoCal Helicopter Noise Areas."

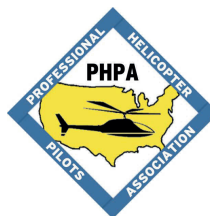
You can find a printable version of "SoCal Helicopter Noise Areas" on the PHPA website ([www.phpa.org](http://www.phpa.org)) or on the PHPA Facebook page.

We urge you to print it out, study it and take it with you. If you come to our events, we will give you a glossy version of this document. Board Member Tony Byrnes created this take-along alert for use by you in the cockpit.

This commentary is the first of a series on noise and helicopters – your helicopter, my helicopter, everyone's helicopter – and the growing concern on the ground for noise from the air. This series will cover the history of noise negotiations, the parties involved, the political actions that have taken place and those that may yet take place, what manufacturers are doing, how PHPA is working with those who are concerned, how PHPA is working with operators, working with the FAA, working with politicians and, most importantly, working with you, the conscientious pilot, to make sure that all of us can enjoy our lives in Los Angeles – those who fly and those who don't. And working to ensure that those of us who fly can do so safely, mission-effectively, and with the good conscience that we are doing all that we can for our friends and fellow citizens who reside, live, work and sleep beneath our rotor blades.

If you would like to get involved in this process – more than you already are as a pilot! – please contact me, Edward Story at [ed.story@phpa.org](mailto:ed.story@phpa.org). Or if you would like to make suggestions or comments on PHPA's activities in this field, please write me. Thank you for reading, thank you for listening, and thank you for flying safely and friendly.

by Edward Story  
PHPA



**Professional Helicopter  
Pilots Association**

**Voicemail Message Center:**  
(323) 929-PHPA (7472)

**Email:**  
[info@phpa.org](mailto:info@phpa.org)

**Mailing Address:**  
PHPA  
PO Box 7059  
Burbank, CA 91510-7059

**Website:**  
[www.phpa.org](http://www.phpa.org)