U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

COPS
COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Series

No. 7

Loud Car Stereos

by
Michael S. Scott

Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Series
Guide No. 7

Loud Car Stereos

Michael S. Scott

This project was supported by cooperative agreement #99-CK-WX-K004 by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.

www.cops.usdoj.gov

About the Guide Series

The *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. The guides are written for police–of whatever rank or assignment–who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who

- Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods. The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (An assessment guide has been produced as a companion to this series and the COPS Office has also published an introductory guide to problem analysis. For those who want to learn more about the principles and methods of problem-oriented policing, the assessment and analysis guides, along with other recommended readings, are listed at the back of this guide.)

- Can look at a problem in depth. Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.

- Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business. The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem.

- Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge. For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.

- Are willing to work with other community agencies to find effective solutions to the problem. The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public entities. An effective problem-solver must know how to forge genuine

partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

The COPS Office and the authors encourage you to provide feedback on this guide and to report on your own agency's experiences dealing with a similar problem. Your agency may have effectively addressed a problem using responses not considered in these guides and your experiences and knowledge could benefit others. This information will be used to update the guides. If you wish to provide feedback and share your experiences it should be sent via e-mail to **cops_pubs@usdoj.gov.**

Acknowledgments

The *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* series is very much a collaborative effort. While each guide has a primary author, other project team members, COPS Office staff and anonymous peer reviewers contributed to each guide by proposing text, recommending research and offering suggestions on matters of format and style.

The principal project team developing the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein, professor emeritus, University of Wisconsin Law School; Ronald V. Clarke, professor of criminal justice, Rutgers University; John E. Eck, associate professor of criminal justice, University of Cincinnati; Michael S. Scott, police consultant, Savannah, Ga.; Rana Sampson, police consultant, San Diego; and Deborah Lamm Weisel, director of police research, North Carolina State University.

Karin Schmerler, Rita Varano and Nancy Leach oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Megan Tate Murphy coordinated the peer reviews for the COPS Office. Suzanne Fregly edited the guides. Research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University under the direction of Phyllis Schultze by Gisela Bichler-Robertson, Rob Guerette and Laura Wyckoff.

The project team also wishes to acknowledge the members of the San Diego, National City and Savannah police departments who provided feedback on the guides' format and style in the early stages of the project, as well as the line police officers, police executives and researchers who peer reviewed each guide.

Contents

About the Guide Series i

Acknowledgments v

The Problem of Loud Car Stereos 1

- Factors Contributing to the Problem of Loud Car Stereos 2
- Related Problems 5

Understanding Your Local Problem 7

- Asking the Right Questions 7
  - Incidents 7
  - Victims 8
  - Offenders 8
  - Locations/Times 9
  - Current Responses 9
- Measuring Your Effectiveness 9

Responses to the Problem of Loud Car Stereos 11

- Enforcement of Noise Laws 12
- Warnings and Education 14
- Response With Limited Effectiveness 16

Appendix: Summary of Responses to Loud Car Stereos 19

Endnotes 23

References 25

About the Author 29

Recommended Readings 31

Other Guides in This Series 35

The Problem of Loud Car Stereos

This guide addresses the problem of loud car stereos, one of the most common sources of noise complaints in many jurisdictions.[†] The guide begins by describing the problem and reviewing factors that contribute to it. It then identifies a series of questions that might assist you in analyzing your local problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem and what is known about these from evaluative research and police practice. Throughout this guide, the term *loud car stereos* is used as a shorthand way of saying *car stereos that are played loudly*. The problem is attributable mainly to the use of special stereo equipment capable of producing extremely loud sound, rather than factory-installed stereo equipment.

Most jurisdictions have some form of noise law that regulates loud car stereos. Police are concerned about loud car stereos for two main reasons: 1) they annoy some people, and 2) they inhibit drivers' ability to hear emergency signals on the road. This guide focuses on the annoyance aspect of loud car stereos, rather than the safety aspect, because there is not much published research and practice related to the latter.[††] Loud car stereos can also make another noise problem worse: they can activate some car alarms. In some jurisdictions, drug dealers advertise by cruising neighborhoods with the car stereo turned up loud. In most jurisdictions, the problem of loud car stereos falls to the police to address, primarily because enforcement carries the risk of violent confrontation.[†††]

The problem of loud car stereos is more widespread than a simple tally of complaints would reveal. Perhaps only 5 to 10 percent of people bothered by any type of noise will file an official complaint, because other factors influence people.[1] Many citizens are not aware of their legal right to quiet and do not know where they can register a complaint.

† *Sound*, *noise* and *annoyance* are not the same thing. *Sound* is merely a physical property entailing sound waves. *Noise* is unwanted sound. *Annoyance* is the negative feeling one gets from being exposed to noise. Sound can be measured in terms of its pressure, frequency, variation, character, and quality. Annoyance is a subjective measure.

†† Police in Prince William County, Va., demonstrated through controlled tests that loud car stereos impair drivers' ability to hear emergency vehicle sirens, and concluded this is a serious aspect of the problem (Smith 2000).

††† At least in the United States, noise control has become almost exclusively a matter for local authorities since the federal government drastically cut back funding for noise control in the early 1980s (Sickler-Hart 1997; Lief 1994; Schultz 1999; Sedgwick 1991).

Consequently, the volume of official complaints about loud car stereos might indicate the existence of a problem, but not necessarily how intense or widespread it is.

† In car stereo competitions, usually sponsored by car stereo manufacturers or distributors, participants receive prizes for the loudest car stereos.

Factors Contributing to the Problem of Loud Car Stereos

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses.

Highly amplified car stereos emit a lot of low-frequency sounds through the systems' woofer speakers. Low-frequency noise is usually found to be more annoying than high-frequency noise at similar volume.[2] The vibrations caused by the low-frequency sound waves can often be felt in addition to being heard. They cause glass and ceramics to rattle, compounding the annoyance.[3]

Playing car stereos loudly can be an act of social defiance by some, or merely inconsiderate behavior by others. For yet others, it is a passionate hobby, an important part of their cultural identity and lifestyle. Judging by the sales marketing of car stereo manufacturers and dealers, the interest in car stereo competitions[†] and the sums of money spent on car stereos, police are confronting a popular and lucrative phenomenon. It is not easy to change the behavior of those who see loud car stereos as an important part of their lifestyle.

Bob Morris

Some car stereo enthusiasts install enormous and expensive sound systems in their vehicles and are highly committed to this hobby. Photo purposely blurred to protect driver's identity.

Overexposure to noise is now understood to have a number of negative health and behavioral effects.[4] Loud car stereos most obviously affect the car occupants' hearing. Noise from a variety of sources, including loud car stereos, can cause hearing loss, disturb sleep, increase stress, make people irritable, and make naturally aggressive people more aggressive. It can make people less likely to help others, and less likely to sit outdoors or participate in social activities. It can compel people to move out of neighborhoods they otherwise like, and thereby depress property values. Some people, such as schoolchildren, hospital patients and the mentally ill, are especially harmed by exposure to loud noise (although loud car stereos may not be a major noise source for these subpopulations).[5]

How annoyed people get about noise depends on a number of factors,[6] including the following:

- The inherent unpleasantness of the sound. This varies widely among individuals and groups. What is music to one is noise to another.

- The persistence and recurrence of the noise. Most listeners can tolerate occasional loud noises more than persistent and recurrent loud noises.
- The meaning listeners attribute to the sound. The information content of the noise influences annoyance, so if listeners do not like the message of the music being played, they are more likely to be annoyed by loud car stereos. Some people perceive loud car stereos to be an expression of rudeness and selfishness, or even a form of aggression–a blatant defiance of social etiquette and norms. If listeners associate loud car stereos with people they think are dangerous, the noise problem seems even more serious.
- Whether the sound interferes with listeners' activities. For example, loud car stereos are more likely to annoy people during nighttime hours than during daytime hours because they disrupt sleep.
- Whether listeners feel they can control the noise. The less control one feels, the more likely the noise will be annoying.[7]
- Whether listeners believe third parties, including police, can control the noise. If people believe a third party can control the noise but has failed to do so, they are more likely to be annoyed by the noise.

Applying these factors to loud car stereos, you can see how the same sound can affect people quite differently: some will enjoy it,[†] while others will hate it.

† Extremely loud music may actually increase adrenaline in some listeners or cause fluids in the ear to shift, either of which can create a pleasurable dizziness and euphoric feeling (Sedgwick 1991; Cooke and McCampbell 1992). Obviously, complainants experience no such pleasure.

People respond to noise in various ways. Some people complain to authorities, some take steps to insulate themselves, some adapt to the noise, and some move away from the noise. Those who complain greatly appreciate effective responses from authorities; no response or ineffective responses are often harshly criticized.[8]

Related Problems

Police are also frequently called upon to address other sources of noise, each calling for its own analysis and responses. Among the related problems not covered in this guide are:

- barking dogs;
- loud vehicle mufflers;
- loud parties and loud stereos in residences;
- loud "boom boxes" (portable radios and tape players);
- loud music in bars and nightclubs;
- audible alarms from buildings and vehicles;
- loud power equipment (e.g., construction equipment, leaf blowers, lawn mowers) being operated at unreasonable hours (early morning, late night); and
- loud vehicles involved in street cruising and street racing.

The traffic safety concerns created by playing car stereos loudly are similar to those associated with other forms of inattentive driving, including the use of cellular phones while driving.

Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of loud car stereos. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of loud car stereos, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on. Community surveys or meetings will likely be necessary to answer many of these questions because many complaints are not officially registered, and existing records may not capture all the information.

Incidents

- How many complaints have been registered about loud car stereos? With whom have they been registered (police, environmental protection officials, elected officials)?
- Have complaints been substantiated through either decibel measurements or officers' judgments?
- How frequent are complaints (daily, weekly, episodic)?
- What percentage of all noise complaints are about loud car stereos?
- Typically, are complaints about loud car stereos in general, about individual cars or about a gathering of cars?
- Are offenders usually driving when playing car stereos loudly, or are they parked (e.g., at a street party, in a park, in a parking lot)?

Victims

- Who complains about loud car stereos? Residents? Merchants? School or hospital officials? Park users? Other motorists?
- Are there persistent complainants?
- Are there any noticeable demographic patterns among victims (age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.)?
- How many people are annoyed by loud car stereos? How annoyed do they claim to be?
- What are their specific complaints? That they are awakened? Cannot hear their televisions? Cannot hear conversations? Are offended by music lyrics? Are made physically uncomfortable by the noise? Are intimidated by the noise?
- What activities are disrupted by loud car stereos (e.g., sleep, commerce, education, recreation)?
- What percentage of people disturbed by loud car stereos file official complaints?

Offenders

- Are there any noticeable demographic patterns among offenders (age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.)?
- Are there different types of offenders (e.g., car stereo enthusiasts, teenagers, street cruisers, drug dealers)? Do the various types of offenders create problems at different times and in different places?
- Are offenders aware of legal restrictions?
- To whom are car stereo owners trying to appeal when they play their stereos loudly? Other car stereo owners? Friends? Members of the opposite sex? Judges in organized competitions? Potential customers for illegal drugs? Themselves?
- What do car stereo owners say would discourage them from playing their stereos in violation of the law?
- Where do car stereo owners buy and have special stereo equipment installed (e.g., local car stereo dealers)?

- How much money have car stereo owners spent on their equipment? (This will give you a better idea of how meaningful various sanctions might be to them.)

Locations/Times

- Where are complaints about loud car stereos concentrated?
- From where do complainants hear loud car stereos (e.g., homes, businesses, vehicles)?
- When are complainants most annoyed by loud car stereos (daytime, nighttime, weekends)?
- Do complaints correspond with any particular events (e.g., closing time for bars, during street cruising events, when schools let out)?

Current Responses

- How are loud car stereo complaints currently handled?
- What existing legislation pertains to the problem? Does that legislation give police and other officials adequate authority to address it?
- Are existing laws adequately enforced?
- Are enforcement actions adequately prosecuted and adjudicated?
- How do other jurisdictions handle this problem?

Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. All measures should be taken in both the target area and the surrounding area. (For more detailed

guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*.)

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to loud car stereos:

- the number of official complaints about loud car stereos filed with police and other agencies;
- the level of annoyance or concern expressed in opinion surveys;
- the percentage of survey respondents who are highly annoyed by loud car stereos;
- the decibel levels at problem locations (it may, however, be difficult to separate the noise from loud car stereos from background noise);
- the number of problem locations (if the problem is concentrated at certain locations);
- the percentage of offenders who are repeat offenders; and
- the sales revenues of and changes in consumer purchases reported by car stereo dealers.[†]

[†] A survey of 20 Chicago car stereo dealers conducted by the Consumer Electronics Manufacturers Association reportedly revealed that their sales declined by 30 percent–and several dealers went out of business–in the period immediately following passage of a new city ordinance regulating loud car stereos (Colarossi 1998). These findings should be considered with caution, as car stereo dealers used the study results to oppose new noise legislation.

Responses to the Problem of Loud Car Stereos

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following set of possible responses provides a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These responses are drawn from the few existing research studies, police reports and journalistic accounts of police practices regarding loud car stereos. In spite of the fact that loud car stereos are a common problem, there are no published studies that evaluate the effectiveness of various responses to the problem. With this caution in mind, you may apply several of these responses to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: give careful consideration to who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.

Some response strategies that have been proposed may have merit, but because they do not appear to have been adopted, they are not presented as currently viable options. These include proposals to ban the manufacture of car stereos that can produce very loud sound,[9] and to hold car stereo manufacturers civilly liable for noise-related harm caused by their products.[10] These proposals would compel manufacturers to make quieter products. Other measures that

can effectively reduce noise levels, such as sound barriers and noise-canceling technology (anti-sound waves that effectively cancel out sound waves), do not seem to hold much promise against mobile sound sources such as car stereos.

Enforcement of Noise Laws

A preliminary word of caution is due regarding enforcing noise laws to address loud car stereos: You should guard against unfairly targeting any racial or ethnic group, and be aware of public perceptions regarding biased enforcement.[11]

1. Enforcing laws that prohibit *plainly audible* car stereos. Some statutes and ordinances prohibit any noise that is *plainly audible* from a specified distance.[†] Most laws of this sort do not require that the music lyrics or melody be intelligible; the bass vibrations alone can suffice. The specified distances vary across jurisdictions, ranging from 15 to 100 feet, depending on how restrictive communities choose to be.[12] The most restrictive of the plainly audible laws say that the sound cannot be audible to anyone other than the vehicle occupants. The specified distances can vary by time of day, typically with shorter distances set for nighttime hours. The advantage of such laws is that they do not require expensive monitoring equipment and the requisite training. Several courts have upheld the plainly audible standard for a noise ordinance in the face of legal challenges.[††] A disadvantage to plainly audible standards is that enforcers must measure distances, something not easily done while a car is moving. But, with a little training, enforcers can learn to estimate distances.

2. Enforcing laws that establish specific decibel limits for car stereos. Some statutes and ordinances set specific decibel limits, measured at specific distances from the source, for various noise sources, including car stereos. These laws are referred to as *performance standard* laws. The typical limit for car

† Many statutes and ordinances regulating noise can be conveniently accessed through the website of the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Vermont. See www.nonoise.org

†† See the State v. Ewing, 914 P. 2d 549, Haw. 1996 finding that a *plainly audible* standard is not unconstitutionally vague.

stereos is around 75 to 80 decibels, measured at various specified distances from the car. The advantage of this type of law is that it is specific and objective. Among the disadvantages is that it requires expensive monitoring equipment and the requisite training, and since cars with loud stereos are often moving, it is difficult to obtain a valid reading of the noise level.[13] Also, background noise can confound noise readings, and some decibel scales do not adequately record the low-frequency sounds common to loud car stereos. The technical requirements necessary to take readings and defend them against legal challenges necessarily limit the number of officials who can enforce performance standard laws.

3. Enhancing penalties or lowering tolerance levels for loud car stereo violations that occur in specified zones. Because loud noise is especially harmful to certain groups of people, such as schoolchildren, hospital patients and the mentally ill, and because complaints about loud car stereos often are concentrated in certain residential neighborhoods, it may make sense to enhance the penalties for violations in areas with vulnerable populations.[14]

4. Enhancing penalties for repeat offenders. In many jurisdictions, laws give judges the discretion to apply harsher penalties for repeat offenders. Higher fines and seizure of car stereo equipment may be reserved for repeat offenders.

5. Impounding cars with loud stereos as evidence. Some jurisdictions, such as New York City[15] and Chicago,[16] authorize police to impound cars with loud stereos and to hold the cars as evidence until the citation has been adjudicated. The impoundment gives the offender extra incentive to appear in court and/or pay the fine and, at a minimum, removes the car from the streets for a brief time.

6. Holding car *owners* liable for loud car stereo violations. In most jurisdictions, the driver is liable for loud car stereo violations. But because police are seldom present when loud car stereos are disturbing others, offenders often avoid being cited. Under what is known as the *owner onus* principle, the registered vehicle owner could be cited in the same way as with a parking citation. Vehicle owners could then transfer the liability for the citation if they showed proof that someone else was operating the vehicle at the time of the offense.[17] The advantage of owner onus laws is that police would not have to conduct traffic stops to issue citations: citizen complaints could form the basis for citations, and agencies other than the police department could assume some responsibility for enforcing the law.

7. Obtaining nuisance abatement orders against loud car stereo owners. Many jurisdictions have detailed nuisance abatement laws and procedures that can potentially be applied to chronic offenders. You should consult with local legal counsel to determine whether and when nuisance abatement is appropriate.

8. Sentencing offenders to listen to music they do not like. This somewhat tongue-in-cheek penalty has actually been imposed by courts in a few jurisdictions.[18]

Warnings and Education

9. Issuing written warnings. Written warnings or notices of violations, commonly used by health inspectors and by police for vehicle defects, can be applied to loud car stereo violations, as well. They put offenders on official notice that they are using their car stereos inappropriately, and give them

an opportunity to modify the equipment, if necessary. An alternative is for police to mail warning letters to the registered vehicle owners. Some jurisdictions encourage complaining citizens to maintain logs that record the date, time, place, and vehicle identifiers associated with loud car stereo incidents. Police mail warning letters on the basis of these complaint logs.[†] This strategy serves two purposes: It can significantly increase the number of incidents that receive some sort of official response, and it can reduce complainants' level of annoyance by giving them a greater sense of control over the problem (recall from the earlier discussion that a low sense of control increases annoyance). If the offenders are teenagers, you might consider seeking their parents' help in getting their children to comply with the law. Official warnings might also be publicly broadcast on popular music radio stations or issued through other mass media formats.

[†] The Savannah, Ga., Police Department has adopted this strategy.

10. Requiring car stereo dealers to provide customers with warnings about the health and legal consequences of playing car stereos loudly. Car stereo dealers can either be required or merely requested to provide their customers with written information about the health hazards and legal consequences of playing their car stereos too loudly. Police can support such efforts by supplying dealers with printed information about local laws and police policies regarding loud car stereos.[††]

[††] The Savannah Police Department is one agency that supplies dealers with warning notices about local noise laws.

11. Posting warning signs in areas where loud car stereos are common. Warning signs, conspicuously posted in areas where complaints about loud car stereos are common, put potential offenders on notice of the possible consequences for violations.

† The St. Petersburg, Fla., Police Department held public demonstrations as part of their "Operation Tone Down" (Gray 1999).

Bob Morris

Conspicuously posted warning signs put potential offenders on notice of the possible consequences for violations of loud car stereo violations.

12. Holding public demonstrations regarding loud car stereo violations. Police can hold demonstrations for car stereo enthusiasts, possibly in conjunction with sponsored competitions or other events, to better communicate laws and policies.† Many car stereo enthusiasts participate in competitions and events sponsored by the car stereo industry. Some enthusiasts may not genuinely appreciate how their hobby disturbs others, or may not know the noise levels at which they are breaking the law.

Response With Limited Effectiveness

13. Enforcing laws that require police to make subjective judgments about noise. Statutes and ordinances that require officers to determine whether noise is "loud and raucous," "unreasonable," "excessive," or "disruptive" are vulnerable to legal challenges on the grounds that they are vague and

overbroad.[20] Noise laws should be neutral as to the information content of the noise, as well. For example, they should not prohibit music that is "offensive" or "obscene." Laws that do are vulnerable to legal challenges on free speech grounds. Nor should noise laws apply only to personal vehicles; they should apply equally to commercial vehicles that use sound-amplifying equipment, such as ice cream trucks.[21]

Appendix: Summary of Responses to Loud Car Stereos

The table below summarizes the responses to loud car stereos, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	**Page No.**	**Response**	**How It Works**	**Works Best If…**	**Considerations**
Enforcement of Noise Laws					
1.	12	Enforcing laws that prohibit *plainly audible* car stereos	Deters offenders through civil fines	…there is adequate enforcement	May require some officer training to estimate distances
2.	12	Enforcing laws that establish specific decibel limits for car stereos	Deters offenders through civil fines	…sound-monitoring equipment is properly calibrated, and officers are properly trained	Difficult to obtain valid readings from moving sound sources; requires expensive sound-monitoring equipment and officer training; background noise can confound readings

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
3.	13	Enhancing penalties or lowering tolerance levels for loud car stereo violations that occur in specified zones	Discourages potential offenders from playing car stereos loudly in areas with especially vulnerable people; potentially displaces offenders to areas where noise is less likely to disturb others	…potential offenders are adequately notified of special zones (through signs, publicity and warnings), and there is adequate enforcement	Requires legislative authorization
4.	13	Enhancing penalties for repeat offenders	Deters chronic offenders through escalating sanctions	…judges are willing to impose increased sanctions	Some chronic offenders are deeply committed to loud car stereos as part of their lifestyle, and are not easily deterred
5.	13	Impounding cars with loud stereos as evidence	Temporarily removes cars from public places; deters offenders by temporarily depriving them of their enjoyment	…there is an efficient system for towing and impounding vehicles	Impoundment for evidence should be equally applied to all vehicles, not used as extra punishment applied solely at officers' discretion
6.	14	Holding car *owners* liable for loud car stereo violations	Allows enforcement without stopping and identifying the driver; encourages car owners to ensure their vehicles are used responsibly	…the general public perceives owner liability for loud car stereo violations as fair, and citations can be issued based on complainants' testimony	Requires legislative authorization

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
7.	14	Obtaining nuisance abatement orders against loud car stereo owners	Deters offenders through a range of civil remedies	…applied against chronic offenders, and there is an efficient system for filing nuisance abatement actions	Must prove the nuisance is ongoing, rather than an isolated incident
8.	14	Sentencing offenders to listen to music they do not like	Deters offenders by exposing them to a similar annoyance and requiring them to spend time complying with the sentence	…judges are willing to impose this sanction (and have a sense of humor)	Is more likely to generate publicity than to deter offenders
Warnings and Education					
9.	15	Issuing written warnings	Puts offenders on official notice of legal restrictions, and that sound levels exceed the limits; gives unwitting offenders the opportunity to comply with the law	…there is a system for tracking official warnings, so that repeat offenders are ultimately subject to formal sanctions	Costs of creating and maintaining a warning record-keeping system
10.	15	Requiring car stereo dealers to provide customers with warnings about the health and legal consequences of playing car stereos loudly	Puts customers on official notice of legal restrictions and encourages their voluntary compliance	…car stereo dealers willingly cooperate	Modest costs of printing and distributing information
11.	16	Posting warning signs in areas where loud car stereos are common	Warns offenders of legal restrictions and encourages their voluntary compliance	…signs are conspicuously posted in areas prone to loud car stereos	Costs of manufacturing and posting signs

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
12.	16	Holding public demonstrations regarding loud car stereo violations	Encourages compliance by giving potential offenders a better understanding of how the law applies to their car stereos, and by allowing them to interact with the police in a nonadversarial setting	…demonstrations are well attended and held in conjunction with car stereo competitions and events	Cooperating with the police may run counter to what some car stereo enthusiasts see as the purpose of having high-powered car stereos
Response With Limited Effectiveness					
13.	17	Enforcing laws that require police to make subjective judgments about noise	Police must judge not only the sound level, but also the content's quality or effect on others	…local courts have upheld police enforcement of this type of law	Requires highly subjective police judgments; such laws are vulnerable to legal challenges on grounds they are vague or overbroad

Endnotes

[1] Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995).
[2] Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995).
[3] Sedgwick (1991).
[4] Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995); Zwerling (1996); Sedgwick (1991).
[5] Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995).
[6] Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995).
[7] Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995); Zwerling (1996).
[8] Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995).
[9] New South Wales Environmental Protection Authority (2000).
[10] Lief (1994).
[11] See, for example, Crawford (2000).
[12] Noise Consultancy (2001); Zwerling et al. (n.d.).
[13] Noise Consultancy (2001); Zwerling et al. (n.d.).
[14] Mancuso (2000). See also Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela (1995).
[15] New York City Police Department (1994); Bratton (1994).
[16] Colarossi (1998).
[17] New South Wales Environmental Protection Authority (2000).
[18] Schultz (1999), reporting on penalties in Fort Lupton, Colo.
[19] Zwerling (1996).
[20] Schultz (1999).
[21] Zwerling et al. (n.d.).

References

Berglund, B., T. Lindvall and D. Schwela (1995). *Guidelines for Community Noise.* Geneva: World Health Organization.

Bratton, W. (1994). "The New York City Police Department's Civil Enforcement of Quality-of-Life Crimes." *Journal of Law and Policy* 3(2):447-464.

Colarossi, A. (1998). "Chicago Alderman Seeks To Soften City's Noise Ordinance, Claiming Ban on Loud Car Music Hurts Retailers." *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 30.

Cooke, P., and M. McCampbell (1992). "Noises Out: What It's Doing to You" and "Noises In: The Culture of Victimization." *New York*, Nov. 2.

Crawford, C. (2000). "Race and Pretextual Stops: Noise Enforcement in Midwest City." *Social Pathology: A Journal of Review* 6(3):213-227.

Gray, L. (1999). "Police To Target Loud Car Stereos." *St. Petersburg Times*, Aug. 24.

Lief, J. (1994). "Insuring Domestic Tranquility Through Quieter Products: A Proposed Product-Nuisance Tort." *Cardozo Law Review* 16:595-648.

Mancuso, S. (2000). "Paulsboro Lowers the Volume: Loud Music and Other Noises Will Now Be Regulated in Response to Residents' Complaints." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 8.

New South Wales Environmental Protection Authority (2000). *Proposed Protection of the Environment Operations (Noise Control) Regulation 2000.* Regulatory impact statement. Sydney, Australia: New South Wales Environmental Protection Authority, Noise Policy Branch. Also accessible at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/download/risnoise.pdf

New York City Police Department (1994). *Police Strategy No. 5: Reclaiming the Public Spaces of New York*. New York: City of New York.

Noise Consultancy (2001). *Code Drafting Tip for 2001: "Boom Cars–Boom Boxes.*" Somerset, N.J.: The Noise Consultancy. www.noiseconsultancy.com

Schultz, S. (1999). "Battle of the Boom Box." *Governing* 13(Oct.):37-38.

Sedgwick, J. (1991). "Cut Out That Racket." *The Atlantic Monthly* (Nov.):50-55.

Sickler-Hart, D. (1997). *Analysis of Albuquerque, New Mexico's Ambient Noise and Albuquerque Environmental Health's Noise Control Program*. Albuquerque, N.M.: Citizens Noise Advisory Group of Greater Albuquerque. www.nonoise.org/quietnet

Smith, G. (2000). "Proposed Noise Ordinance Amendments." Internal memorandum to the chief of police, Prince William County, VA. May 17.

Zwerling, E. (1996). "Turning Down the Volume: Effective Strategies for Community Noise Enforcement." *Police Chief* 63(12):53, 54-55, 59.

Zwerling, E., D. Pinto, P. Hanna, J. Lepis, and B. Turpin (n.d.). *Local Noise Enforcement Options and Model Noise Ordinance: With Preapproved Language for the State of New Jersey.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Rutgers University.

About the Author

Michael S. Scott

Michael S. Scott is an independent police consultant based in Savannah, Ga. He was formerly chief of police in Lauderhill, Fla.; served in various civilian administrative positions in the St. Louis Metropolitan, Ft. Pierce, Fla., and New York City police departments; and was a police officer in the Madison, Wis., Police Department. Scott developed training programs in problem-oriented policing at the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), and is a judge for PERF's Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing. He is the author of *Problem-Oriented Policing: Reflections on the First 20 Years*, and coauthor (with Rana Sampson) of *Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems: Case Studies in Problem-Solving*. Scott holds a law degree from Harvard Law School and a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Recommended Readings

- ***A Police Guide to Surveying Citizens and Their Environments***, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993. This guide offers a practical introduction for police practitioners to two types of surveys that police find useful: surveying public opinion and surveying the physical environment. It provides guidance on whether and how to conduct cost-effective surveys.

- ***Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers***, by John E. Eck (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001). This guide is a companion to the *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* series. It provides basic guidance to measuring and assessing problem-oriented policing efforts. Available at www.cops.usdoj.gov.

- ***Conducting Community Surveys***, by Deborah Weisel (Bureau of Justice Statistics and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1999). This guide, along with accompanying computer software, provides practical, basic pointers for police in conducting community surveys. The document is also available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.

- ***Crime Prevention Studies***, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Criminal Justice Press, 1993, et seq.). This is a series of volumes of applied and theoretical research on reducing opportunities for crime. Many chapters are evaluations of initiatives to reduce specific crime and disorder problems.

- ***Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing: The 1999 Herman Goldstein Award Winners.*** This document produced by the National Institute of Justice in collaboration with the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Police Executive Research Forum provides detailed reports of the best submissions to the annual award program that recognizes exemplary problem-oriented responses to various community problems. A similar publication is available for the award winners from subsequent years. The documents are also available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij.

- ***Not Rocket Science? Problem-Solving and Crime Reduction***, by Tim Read and Nick Tilley (Home Office Crime Reduction Research Series, 2000). Identifies and describes the factors that make problem-solving effective or ineffective as it is being practiced in police forces in England and Wales.

- ***Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention***, by Marcus Felson and Ronald V. Clarke (Home Office Police Research Series, Paper No. 98, 1998). Explains how crime theories such as routine activity theory, rational choice theory and crime pattern theory have practical implications for the police in their efforts to prevent crime.

- ***Problem-Oriented Policing***, by Herman Goldstein (McGraw-Hill, 1990, and Temple University Press, 1990). Explains the principles and methods of problem-oriented policing, provides examples of it in practice, and discusses how a police agency can implement the concept.

- ***Problem-Oriented Policing: Reflections on the First 20 Years***, by Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000). Describes how the most critical elements of Herman Goldstein's problem-oriented policing model have developed in practice over its 20-year history, and proposes future directions for problem-oriented policing. The report is also available at www.cops.usdoj.gov.

- ***Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News,*** by John E. Eck and William Spelman (Police Executive Research Forum, 1987). Explains the rationale behind problem-oriented policing and the problem-solving process, and provides examples of effective problem-solving in one agency.

- ***Problem-Solving Tips: A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships*** By Karin Schermler, Matt Perkins, Scott Phillips, Tammy Rinehart, and Meg Townsend. (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1998) (also available at www.cops.usdoj.gov). Provides a brief introduction to problem-solving, basic information on the SARA model and detailed suggestions about the problem-solving process.

- ***Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies***, Second Edition, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Harrow and Heston, 1997). Explains the principles and methods of situational crime prevention, and presents over 20 case studies of effective crime prevention initiatives.

- ***Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems: Case Studies in Problem-Solving***, by Rana Sampson and Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000) (also available at www.cops.usdoj.gov). Presents case studies of effective police problem-solving on 18 types of crime and disorder problems.

- ***Using Analysis for Problem-Solving: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement***, by Timothy S. Bynum (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001) (also available at www.cops.usdoj.gov). Provides an introduction for police to analyzing problems within the context of problem-oriented policing.

- ***Using Research: A Primer for Law Enforcement Managers***, Second Edition, by John E. Eck and Nancy G. LaVigne (Police Executive Research Forum, 1994). Explains many of the basics of research as it applies to police management and problem-solving.

Other Guides in This Series

Problem-Oriented Guides for Police series (Available at www.cops.usdoj.gov):

1. **Assaults in and Around Bars.** Michael S. Scott. 2001.
2. **Street Prostitution.** Michael S. Scott. 2001.
3. **Speeding in Residential Areas.** Michael S. Scott. 2001.
4. **Drug Dealing in Privately Owned Apartment Complexes**. Rana Sampson. 2001.
5. **False Burglar Alarms.** Rana Sampson. 2001.
6. **Disorderly Youth in Public Places.** Michael S. Scott. 2001.
7. **Loud Car Stereos.** Michael S. Scott. 2001.
8. **Robbery at Automated Teller Machines.** Michael S. Scott. 2001.
9. **Graffiti.** Deborah Lamm Weisel. 2002.
10. **Thefts of and From Cars in Parking Facilities.** Ronald V. Clarke. 2002.
11. **Shoplifting.** Ronald V. Clarke. 2002.
12. **Bullying in Schools.** Rana Sampson. 2002.
13. **Panhandling.** Michael S. Scott. 2002.
14. **Rave Parties.** Michael S. Scott. 2002.
15. **Burglary of Retail Establishments.** Ronald V. Clarke. 2002.
16. **Clandestine Drug Labs.** Michael S. Scott. 2002.
17. **Acquaintance Rape of College Students.** Rana Sampson. 2002.
18. **Burglary of Single-Family Houses.** Deborah Lamm Weisel. 2002.
19. **Misuse and Abuse of 911.** Rana Sampson. 2002.

Companion guide to the Problem-Oriented Guides for Police series:

- **Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers.** John E. Eck. 2002.

Other Related COPS Office Publications

- **Using Analysis for Problem-Solving: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement.** Timothy S. Bynum.
- **Problem-Oriented Policing: Reflections on the First 20 Years.** Michael S. Scott. 2001.
- **Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems: Case Studies in Problem-Solving.** Rana Sampson and Michael S. Scott. 2000.
- **Community Policing, Community Justice, and Restorative Justice: Exploring the Links for the Delivery of a Balanced Approach to Public Safety.** Caroline G. Nicholl. 1999.
- **Toolbox for Implementing Restorative Justice and Advancing Community Policing.** Caroline G. Nicholl. 2000.
- **Problem-Solving Tips: A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships.** Karin Schmerler, Matt Perkins, Scott Phillips, Tammy Rinehart and Meg Townsend. 1998.

For more information about the *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* series and other COPS Office publications, please call the Department of Justice Response Center at 1.800.421.6770 or check our website at www.cops.usdoj.gov.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
1100 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

To obtain details on COPS programs, call the
U.S. Department of Justice Response Center at 1.800.421.6770

Visit the COPS internet web site by the address listed below.

e05021550 Created Date: May 22, 2002