

Keeping out noise

New standards set by CMHC

When most of us think of pollution we think of air and water being destroyed. But there is another kind of pollution disrupting our environment—noise pollution.

Noise is unwanted sound. It can make conversation difficult, concentration impossible and sleep an unrealized dream.

In a bid to reduce the noise menace, the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation recently set new standards of acceptable home noise levels. They will apply to homes built after July 31, 1978, with National Housing Act financing. These standards are the product of a ten year, CMHA-financed study by the National Research Council into the effects on daily life of two of the most common sound offenders—road and railway noise.

Research determined 40 dB (decibels) is the maximum level at which comfortable conversation can be carried on. If sound levels in your living room or dining room are higher, you are raising your voice to talk and straining to hear. In activity areas—hallways, kitchens, bathrooms—tolerable noise levels are naturally higher, with a maximum of 45 dB. Undisturbed sleep requires extra quiet, so bedroom noise levels are set at 35 dB.

CMHC standards are concerned with noise outside the home as well as inside. If people are to enjoy their gardens, patios and balconies, they must be free from the roar of passing traffic or the clatter of a nearby railway.

The outdoors is bound to be noisier than the controlled environment in the home, but

outside noise levels should not exceed 55 dB. This allows people to talk at close range without raising their voices.

For most of us there are only two broad categories of sound distinction, noisy and quiet. So how do scientists determine such precise noise levels? As amazing as it may seem, they have developed a complex mathematical formula to determine noise levels for each room in a house and for the lot outside. This formula takes into account the home's distance from the noise source, the nature of the noise source, the natural topography of the house site and the materials from which the house is constructed.

If outside noise levels are calculated at no more than 55 dB, construction meeting the residential standards of the

Canadian Building Code would normally keep out excess noise. Housing where noise levels run between 55 dB and 75 dB can qualify for NHA financing if adequate sound insulation is provided. Housing where the outside noise levels exceed 75 dB is automatically disqualified from NHA financing.

Intelligent planning in the early stages can save time and money. Making use of the natural features of a site and its surroundings can reduce the noise impact on proposed housing. Rolling or hilly terrain will act as a barrier to noise and provide protection to nearby homes. Where natural features cannot be used to reduce noise levels, there are a number of simple solutions that can be adopted. The most effective is to increase the distance between the noise source and the house, or alternately, to construct mounds of earth (berms) or barriers made of concrete, brick, wood or metal which will cut down the noise level.

Inside the house the external noise levels may be reduced to acceptable limits by improving the construction of the outside shell of the building. For example, solid double doors provide the best protection against noise, while a single hollow core offers the least protection.

Openable windows provide little protection, while sealed windows provide the most noise reduction. In planning the internal layout, rooms where quiet is needed, such as bedrooms, should be located on the side of the house farthest from the traffic.

Noise is more than a nuisance, it is a hazard to our physical and emotional health. But by improving the standards of the homes we

live in and their surroundings, much can be done to counter the noise menace and make daily living more pleasant.

Construction going metric

Metri-fication—the term still boggles the minds of many Canadians, even though this country started down the road to metric conversion eight years ago.

Conversion to metric is not merely change for change's sake. Most nations in the world operate on the Systeme international d'unites or SI. This system is based on units of ten and it provides measurements for all physical qualities in present day technology.

Metric's decimal base and unit coherence mean industries can avoid cumbersome conversion factors required for so many everyday calculations in the imperial system.

Not only is the metric system ultimately more simple than the old imperial system, its application to industries will help expand overseas markets for Canadian materials and machines.

This year Canada passed one of the biggest hurdles on the road to metric conversion. On January 1, the construction industry began operating in the new system. Now all construction plans, drawings, specifications and materials are in metric units.

In co-operation with the industry, the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation converted its internal operations to metric.

Naturally this change takes a period of adjustment, time to replace old imperial mental images with new metric ones. Metric housing projects, already successfully underway in several Canadian communities, are a tribute to the relative ease with which conversion can take place once old prejudices are given up. The key to successful conversion is adopting a metric mentality, learning to think in the new system's units.

In the construction industry the effects of metric conversion are paradoxical. Obviously every aspect of an industry so dependent on measurement is affected, though this widespread change is hardly noticeable.

The needs of people in their homes and offices remain unchanged, so door heights, window sizes and floor spaces are not appreciably altered. The kitchen counter height in most homes is slightly under three feet. The new metric kitchen counter height is 900 mm (millimetres), or about a finger nail width shorter.

Renting?

Check the lease

Home ownership is considered part of every Canadian's dream. In reality ownership is not for everyone.

Many young people elect for the freedom of renting. Their careers are in transition and their future needs undetermined. Renting gives them the flexibility they want. Older people are regularly giving up ownership of their homes for rental accommodation, where snow removal and grass cutting are the landlord's responsibility. And lastly, many families rent while they are saving to buy a home.

As with home ownership, rental should not take more than 25 per cent of your gross income. This figure can be adjusted modestly upwards or downwards, depending on where housing falls on your

list of spending priorities.

When you find a rental home, the agreement is legalized by signing a lease with the landlord.

The lease describes the property, the amount of rent and conditions of payment, the rules of occupancy—for instance, if pets are permitted—and the length of the lease.

Provincial governments have laws ensuring the rental agreement is fair to both tenant and landlord. The law guarantees the tenant's right to renew the lease, so the landlord cannot toss him out on whim.

Sometimes the landlord and tenant cannot agree on terms of the lease, such as rent. The dispute is then brought before the provincial rent control board, or equivalent authority, which rules on

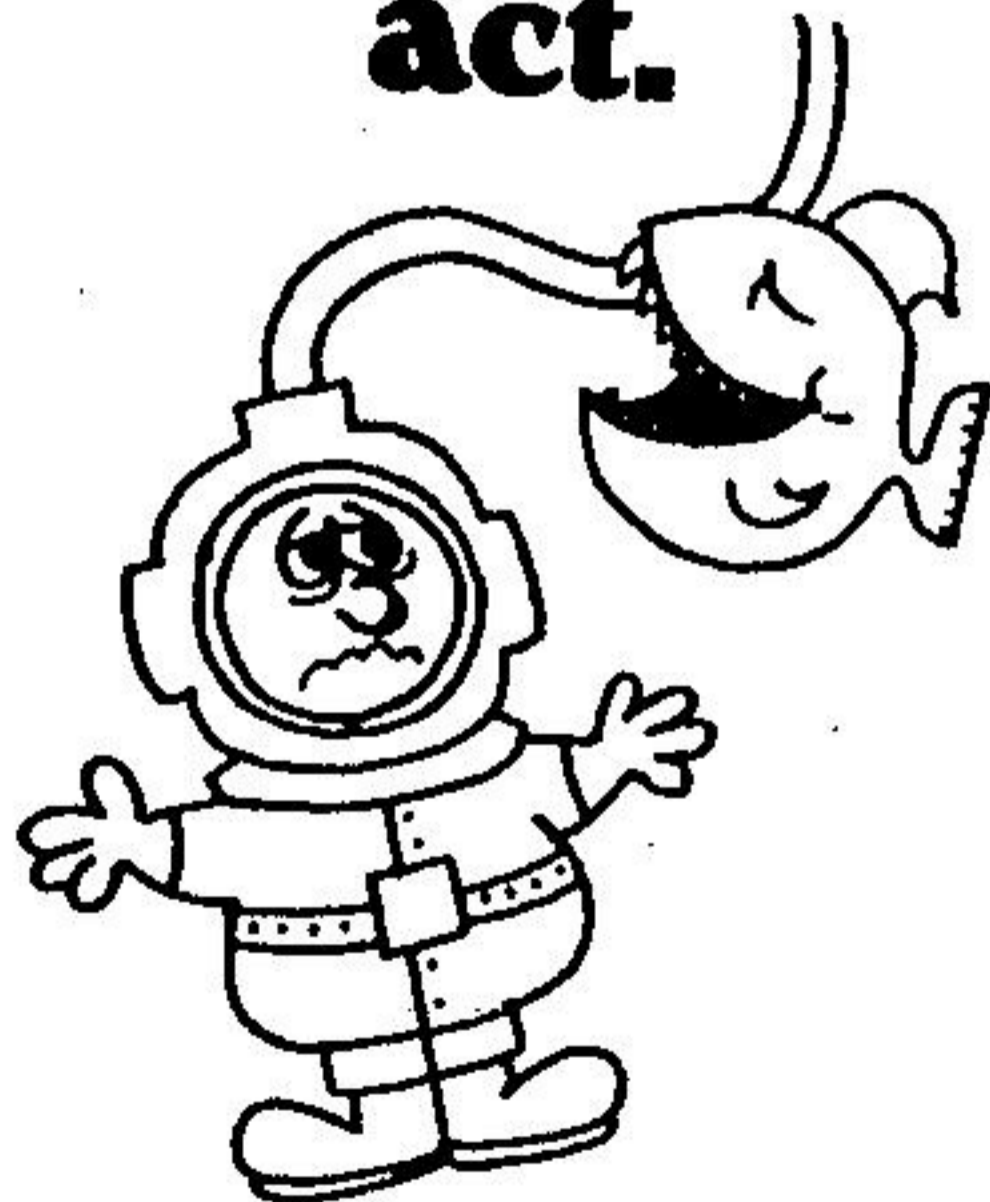
the matter.

These rentals do not remove your responsibility to see your lease is fair. You must read it thoroughly, making sure you understand its provisions—whether you pay hydro, the charges for the parking and such.

You should personally view the premises before signing the lease taking note of any conditions that are unsatisfactory. Make sure repairs and changes are written in the lease with a stipulated time for completion.

As a tenant you do not have as big an investment in your home as an owner, but you should still protect yourself against loss by fire or theft. Insurance will cover this as well as any damage you might cause to the property of the landlord or other tenants.

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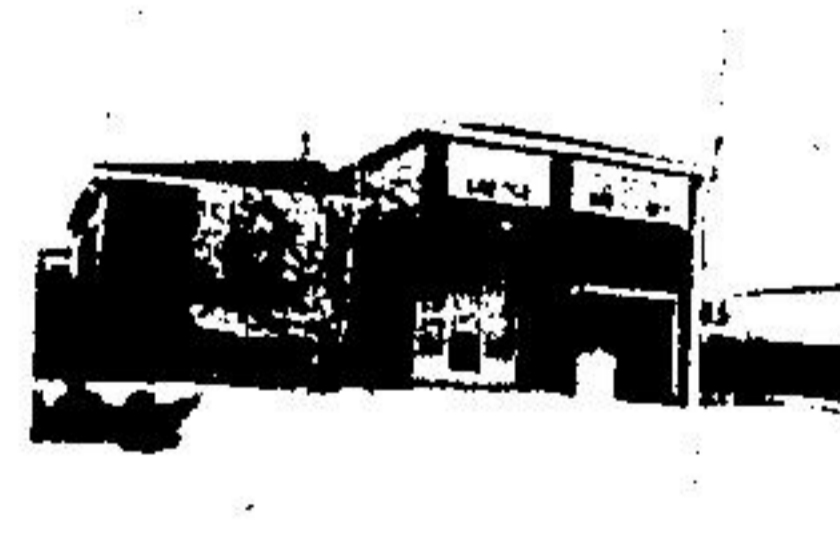
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