

Consider the people who can't hear you

By ALF STONG
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In December of last year, the Ministry of Community and Social Services issued a series of Guidelines on Designing for Hearing Handicapped Persons, which began with the following Preamble:

"Most persons, when they think of barrier free design, think about access of physically handicapped individuals to public and private buildings. However, deaf and blind persons are constantly frustrated by the barriers which our environment presents to them in the area of communication. In the hierarchy of disabling conditions blindness is relatively privileged, and deafness is very underprivileged. Deafness is isolating and socially destructive in a way that blindness is not because the problems of communication are greater."

Helen Keller once wrote — and who should know better — that between blindness and deafness the worst by far is deafness for it severs one from direct and easy contact with others.

More than 1.5 million Canadians suffer from impaired hearing, 550,000 of them in this Province. Some 8,000 Ontarians are classified as deaf. An invisible handicap, deafness or impaired hearing is frequently

neither recognized nor acknowledged. Moreover, it tends not to evoke the same immediate sympathy as other more obvious disabilities.

In fact, it frequently arouses actual impatience with a person's inability to understand quickly.

Certainly, it's annoying to be asked to repeat something one has said, but imagine the frustration of the hearing-impaired people who are faced with a continuous battle to understand what is being said, what is going on around them.

Of course, a number of devices have been developed to assist deaf people to communicate. However, amplification can accomplish only so much. For some people, the threshold of hearing awareness is close to the threshold of actual pain caused by amplification.

In other cases, the amplification of unwanted background noise negates the understanding of close-up sounds.

To overcome the communication gap, people with impaired hearing use a wide variety of communication modes, including sign language and finger spelling, reading and writing, mime and gesture, speech and lipreading, and-or a combination of several of

those methods. All these methods require patience and understanding from the rest of us; some require special knowledge and training.

In this connection, if you are attempting to communicate with someone who has a hearing problem, don't place yourself between that person and a light source, but stand so that the light is to their back.

There's no need to shout, but be careful to face them and speak clearly, don't wave your hands in front of your mouth, and don't mumble.

Telephones are a special problem, of course, for people who have impaired hearing. A number of signals have been devised to alert a person to the fact that someone is trying to reach him/her.

An amplifying handset is available, with a volume-control wheel. This may amplify up to 100 times.

There is also a bone conduction receiver, a watch case receiver (tiny apparatus enabling a third person with normal hearing to listen in and repeat the incoming message so that a deaf person can lipread and participate); and a tele-muff, for those with minimal hearing loss affected mainly by distracting room sounds.

Some public telephones, it has been suggested, should have clearly indicated receivers equipped with amplifiers. Think for a moment about the special problems which arise for someone with impaired hearing when travelling, because they are unable to hear departure announcements or changes. What about vital telephone calls to doctors or repairmen, or emergency calls to the police or hospital?

Imagine yourself unable to use the intercom system to gain entry to an apartment building, or — worse — unable to hear an emergency alarm.

The building laws of many jurisdictions, including Ontario, don't take the deaf into consideration with respect to alarm systems. Tragic emphasis was given to the need for such consideration 13 years ago when a fire swept the YMCA in Chicago. Alarms were duly sounded and someone knocked on every door, warning people to make a rapid exit. Nine deaf people died.

Apart from the question of public alarm systems, no one has yet evolved a

modestly priced device for homes similar to the generally available smoke detector which would alert deaf people to imminent danger. A flickering light alarm is one possibility, and a sleeping deaf person is known to be awakened by such a light even if it's only a 25-watt bulb.

One suggestion is for a unit similar to that which enables deaf people to talk on the telephone — a teletypewriter device (TTY), which began with modified obsolete Telex sets, and permits a deaf person to type words into a small, computer-like, sender-receiving set, with the words appearing in red on a small screen.

Other suggestions made in the Ministry Guidelines are as follows: flashing lights for doorbells and alarm clocks; a light-microphone system to alert deaf parents when their baby is crying; public earphones in theatres and concert halls; induction loops to permit partially deaf people to increase the volume received by a hearing-aid without causing discomfort to others.

The Ministry guidelines make no pretence at

being complete, and the primary objective is to heighten awareness and encourage designers, social workers, individuals and organizations to consider the problems of the hearing-impaired people who want so much to live a "normal" life.

3 arrested when police search house

York Regional Police executed a search warrant at a residence at 3483 Rutherford Road, Woodbridge on September 10 and three men were arrested.

One man was charged with defacing currency, when police found a quantity of money stamped with the insignia of the Black Diamond Riders Motorcycle Club.

He was also charged with possession of a dangerous weapon.

A second man was charged with possession of a dangerous weapon.

The third man was charged with possession of articles stolen from the mails, when police found two mail sacks, which had been stolen.

All three accused appeared in court Monday.

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