

PRIVACY CRISIS IN THE WORKPLACE

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What do hypertension, sleep disorders, cardiovascular disease, impaired cognition and being annoyed have in common? All are possible outcomes of too much noise around us. Many people complain about noise, but fewer realize how harmful it can be.

Defined by scientists as “unwanted sound” - noise puts a burden on our hearts and brains, as well as our ears, according to research in the field of environmental noise.

In offices, irritating noise can come from many different sources: air conditioning, obnoxious ringtones, construction, and unsophisticated sound-masking systems and-especially-other people’s voices. Noisy environments tend to get worse over time and are a source of disruption in the workplace, affecting worker happiness and productivity.

Studies have shown that annoyance is the most common response to noise. We are easily set off by noise because we have been programmed to be aware of sounds as possible dangers. We are constantly alert to our environment, and noise easily makes us uneasy. Lab studies on humans as well as animals have shown that exposure to noise arouses the nervous system, causing rising blood pressure and the release of stress hormones. Over time, these instinctive responses can stress the cardiovascular system and give rise to negative outcomes such as anger and exhaustion.

As if those effects aren’t bad enough, cognitive impairment is another non-auditory result of noise that researchers have been studying. More than 20 studies in multiple countries have shown that environmental noise negatively affects school children’s learning.

Without effective acoustical solutions, experts say, the negative impacts of day-to-day noise in office environments can be significant.

Cognitively, there is plenty of research that shows that the most destructive sound of all is other people’s conversations.

The level of noise for the type of work that is supposed to happen in the workplace is an issue. In some open-plan offices the level of noise can make cognitively demanding work difficult.

The recommended noise level for intellectual work pertains to participating in discussions and meetings as well as working solo.

In other words, in noisy environments with poor acoustics, workers can just as easily get stressed by trying to hear others as by trying not to hear others-a lose/lose proposition.

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The solution is a variety of workplace environments, each designed with consciousness of sound for the task and the people using the spaces. Good acoustics can reduce stress in the workplace and make environments more productive.

Sound masking is designed to cover:

- ▶ Human voice in corporate, healthcare and similar worksettings
- ▶ Light office sounds such as keyboard typing and papers shuffling
- ▶ Some echoes in reverberant spaces
- ▶ Light traffic noise

There are many different options for sound masking that can be tailored to your specific needs. Some available key features of sound masking are:

- ▶ Direct field speaker technology which provides a more uniform sound masking level.
- ▶ Paging and music capability integrated to the system.
- ▶ Simple layout and installation.
- ▶ Flexibility for installation in unique spaces such as open plenum or drywall ceilings.
- ▶ Emitters are plug and play and do not require tuning.
- ▶ Control modules allow up to five different zones with coverage up to 180,000 ft².

Corporate Interiors is an industry leading provider of sound masking and acoustics. Our Architectural Solutions Engineers are experts in integrating technology and furniture with an innovative construction process to create a more effective and productive workplace.

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