

Elkhart, Indiana Noise Ordinance Yields Drugs and Weapons Arrests and Pays for Itself



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Elkhart, Indiana, a town of around 52,000 near the University of Notre Dame, is an anti-noise success story. The city's anti-noise program relies on active enforcement of noise ordinances to reduce noise. The strict fines from noise enforcement generate revenues to fund a noise enforcement officer and anti-noise publicity. Also, the lessening noise levels have improved the community's quality of life and reduced crime.

In 2008, I told the Common Council: "We are determined to eradicate noise pollution in our city, from boom boxes, broken mufflers, train whistles, loud motorcycles and other sources by initiating a zero tolerance noise ordinance."

Police Chief Pflibsen and I recently hired a noise control police officer. In 2009, the officer issued 1,200 tickets, generating more than \$273,000 in fines. In two years, noise fines have generated more than \$400,000.

The fines not only deter noise and punish noisemakers; they also fund the anti-noise program. Noise fine revenues have been used to equip two Mustangs as unmarked police vehicles as well as produce and distribute public service announcements on the hazards of noise.

Fines for noise violators in Elkhart are stiff:

- \$ 250: first offense
- \$ 500: second offense
- \$1000: third offense
- \$2500: fourth offense

Last year, Elkhart's noise control officer did more drug busts than any other Elkhart police officer—and he was looking for noise violators, not drugs. Elkhart's experience demonstrates the strong link between noise, guns, drugs, gangs, and crime.

Elkhart officials are enthusiastic about the anti-noise program. According to Police Chief Pflibsen, "Elkhart's noise ordinance has had a positive impact on the city's quality of life." Tim Balyeat, Elkhart's assistant police chief, commented that "since the inception of the anti-noise program, Elkhart has become a quieter place to live."

Bradley Vite, an Elkhart resident who led the campaign to institute the policy, said that "Elkhart's anti-noise program is a great tool to reduce crime. Elkhart's noise

control police officers have found meth labs, marijuana, cocaine, weapons, and individuals with outstanding warrants. Noise is a quality of life issue. The actions of the city government and the police have dramatically reduced noise.”

Ted Rueter, Noise Free America’s director, stated that “Elkhart’s anti-noise program is a model for the nation. No taxpayer money is involved. The noisemakers themselves fund the program. If every community took noise enforcement seriously, crime would be reduced significantly.”

Resources

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