



Noise pollution in Hong Kong

Figure 1 – Overall pollution complaints in Hong Kong

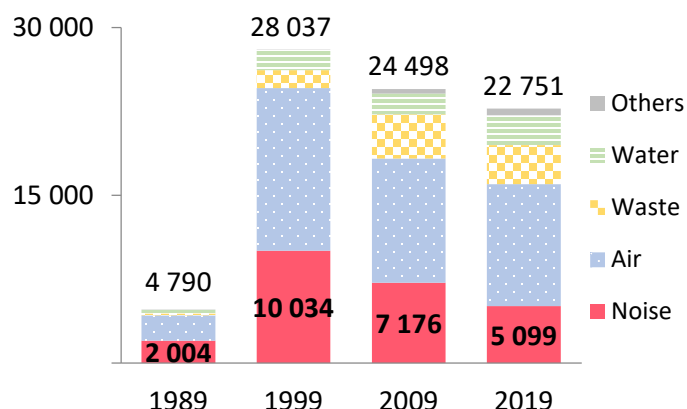


Figure 2 – Noise pollution complaints by source in 2019

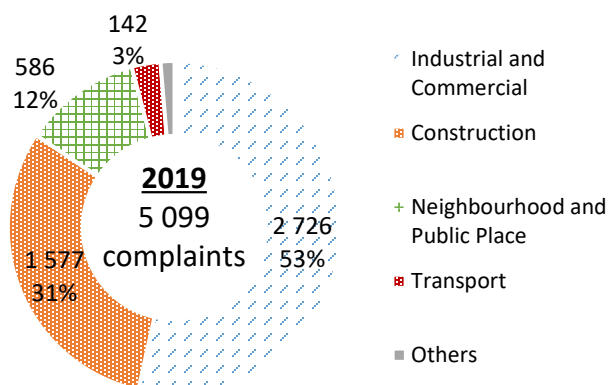
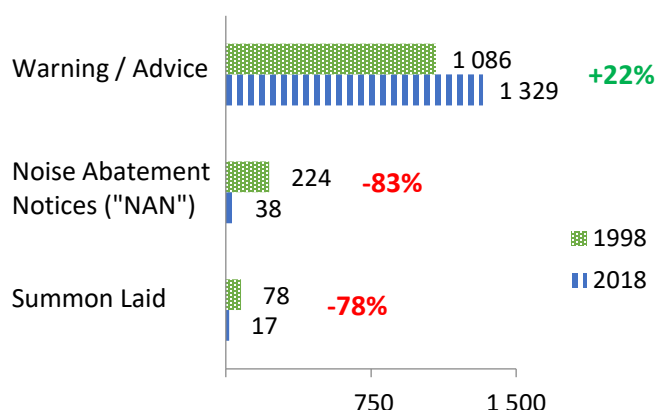


Figure 3 – Enforcement on industrial and commercial noise, 1998-2018

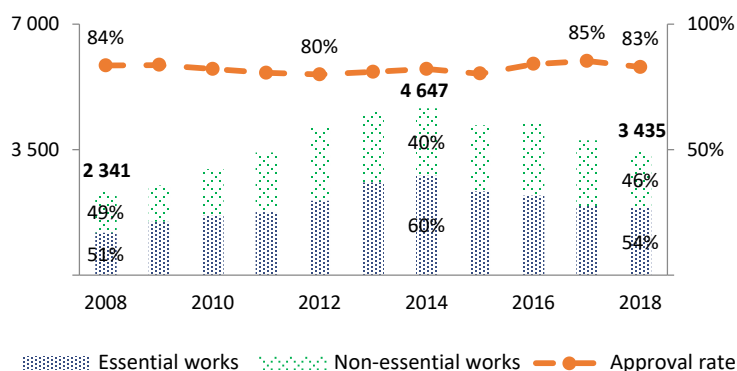


Highlights

- In face of growing concerns over noise pollution, the Government enacted the Noise Control Ordinance ("NCO") in 1989, imposing statutory limit of noise generated from various sources. During the first decade of implementation, the number of complaints over noise pollution witnessed a four-fold upsurge to about 10 030 cases in 1999 (**Figure 1**). The situation seems to have improved afterwards, upon enhanced enforcement and increased public awareness. Noise complaints thus fell by half in the next two decades to only 5 100 cases in 2019.
- Analysed by source, the "industrial and commercial" ("I&C") sector was the largest noise generator in 2019, with a share of 53% in overall complaints (**Figure 2**). It was largely related to noise emitted by restaurants and retail outlets in close proximity to residential premises. This was followed by noise from "construction" (31%) and "neighbourhood and public place" (12%). To reduce noise arising from singing activities in public parks, the Government has just amended the Pleasure Grounds Regulation in July 2020, enabling park keeper to be prosecution witness and quintupling the maximum penalties to HK\$10,000.
- To tackle noise emitted from I&C premises, the Government usually first issues verbal warnings, followed by Noise Abatement Notices ("NAN") or even summonses if they still do not comply with stipulated noise level within 2-3 months. During 1998-2018, the number of such warnings increased by 22% to 1 330, but the number of NAN plunged by 83% (**Figure 3**). Concurrently, the number of summonses also plummeted by 78%, partly due to enhanced deterrent effect after an amendment of NCO in 2001, holding corporate directors accountable for criminal liability of recurrent noise offences.

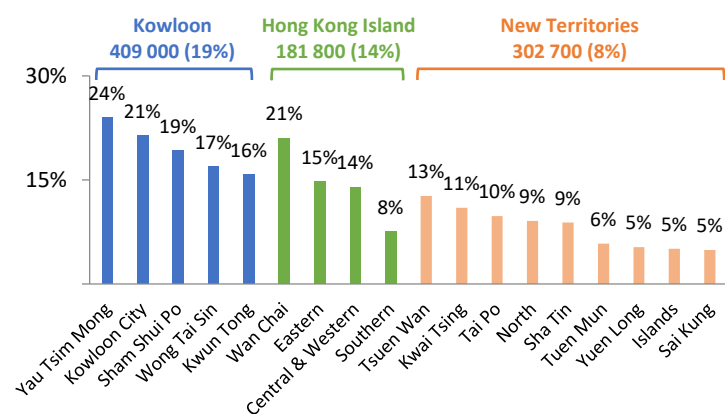
Noise pollution in Hong Kong (cont'd)

Figure 4 – Construction noise permits issued⁽¹⁾ and approval rate



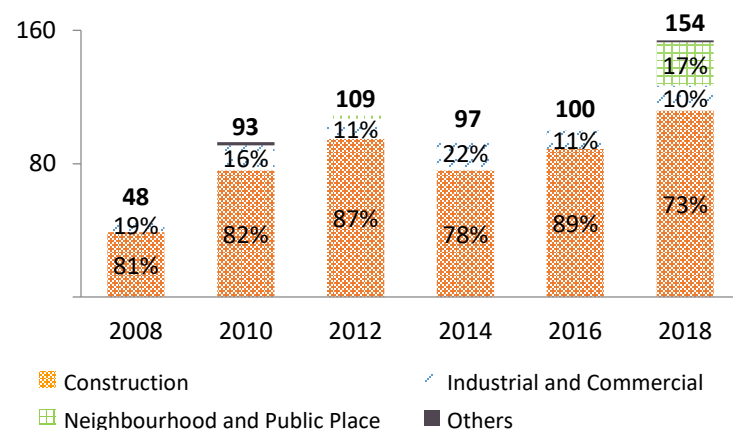
Note: (1) Only included CNP for construction works at night and on holiday.

Figure 5 – Share of population exposed to excessive traffic noise⁽¹⁾ by district in 2014



Note: (1) Referring to traffic noise greater than 70 dB(A) for six minutes within a one-hour period.

Figure 6 – Prosecutions under NCO, 2008-2018



Highlights

- Turning to construction noise, contractors need to apply for time-restricted permit in advance. The number of Construction Noise Permits ("CNP") issued for work using powered mechanical equipment at night (i.e. 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.) and on holiday reached a high of 4 650 in 2014, but declined by 26% to 3 440 in 2018, along with easing construction volume in local society (**Figure 4**). By and large, about half of CNP was issued for essential works (e.g. utilities and roadwork) over the past decade. On approval rate of CNP, it hovered within a narrow range of 80%-85% over years.
- Traffic is now the fourth largest source of noise complaints, taking account of only 3% of overall caseload. That said, the Government estimated that it affected as many as 900 000 local residents (i.e. 12% of population) in 2014 (**Figure 5**). For three crowded districts (i.e. Yau Tsim Mong, Kowloon City and Wan Chai), the respective shares of population facing excessive traffic noise even exceeded 20%. To tackle traffic noise, the Government has installed more than 105 km of noise barriers and screens along new roads constructed after 1990, benefitting some 350 000 people.
- As regards prosecutions under NCO, the total number has tripled from 48 to 154 cases during 2008-2018 (**Figure 6**). Within which, over 70% targeted at construction noise with a broader environmental impact. That said, there are concerns that the penalty for construction noise offence was on the low side, averaging at only HK\$9,200 in 2018, less than 10% of the maximum fine on first conviction (i.e. HK\$100,000).

Data sources: Latest figures from Environmental Protection Department, Home Affairs Bureau and Census and Statistics Department.

Research Office
Information Services Division
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Tel: 2871 2114

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