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News release

For immediate publication

**MAY 2005 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS MONTH:
OOAQ LAUNCHES NOISE AWARENESS WEEK
Visit Complexe Desjardins on May 17, 18, or 19**

Montréal, May 5, 2005 — Our environment has never been as noisy as it is today. Most of the noise-producing equipment and machinery that we use from day to day was invented in the second half of the 20th century: blenders, vacuum cleaners, hairdryers, snowblowers, garbage trucks, subways, car alarms, lawnmowers, power saws, snowmobiles and personal watercraft, jet aircraft, and noisy toys, to name just a few! On top of that, we also have contemporary phenomena such as road and air traffic, rock concerts, and discos.

This year, in order to help people to become more aware of the growing problem of noise in our society and of its impact on the quality of life of individuals and communities, the Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec (OOAQ) has made noise the focus of *Communication and Communication Disorders* month. On **May 17, 18, and 19** from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., you can meet with audiologists in the Grande-Place at Complexe Desjardins. A sound level meter will be travelling around the city and transmitting decibel readings from particularly noisy or busy areas. Audiologists will be on hand to interpret the data, and to provide visitors with information concerning the various acoustic environments that we encounter in our daily lives. These hearing specialists will be able to explain the insidious effect that all of these noises have on the health of both adults and children. They will also provide tips on simple ways for workers, residents, parents, and students to reduce noise.

Public health authorities, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse in the United States, are becoming increasingly concerned about the problem of noise, which was also one of the main issues that was addressed during the annual public health days that were organized by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec last December.

According to OOAQ President and Executive Director Louis Beaulieu, “Europe is way ahead of Canada and the United States in the area of controlling noise. Organizations like the WHO have proposed measures that European officials have put into practice, such as incorporating noise-control mechanisms into their legislation. Technology is meant to improve the quality of our lives, but it has also created a noisy environment that keeps intensifying. Here in Quebec, and all across Canada, legislation governing noise from recreational activities and in living environments is often inadequate or non-existent. In order to limit the proliferation of noise, and its impacts, we must reduce it at the source, and not only individually, but also by adopting specific standards to control and define the use of noise-producing devices. We must also adopt appropriate legislation to stave off the impact of future noise-producing technology.”

A few statistics concerning the effects of noise pollution and its consequences

At work and at play, our living environment is full of noise. Prolonged exposure to noise not only affects our health and quality of life, but also damages our hearing. Hearing loss is insidious: once the noise has done its job, damage is permanent and irreversible. The longer we are exposed to hazardous levels (i.e.: more than **75 dBA**), the more serious the eventual hearing loss will be. There is also a direct link between length of exposure, noise level, and hearing damage: hearing damage doubles with each **3-dB** increase in the level of exposure to noise. For example, exposure to **85 dBA** (equivalent to the noise of a diesel truck) for 8 hours per day is as hazardous to hearing as exposure to **100 dBA** (a walkman playing at full volume or a snowmobile) for only 15 minutes per day.

Similarly, exposure to loud music can have the same effect as working in a factory, where it has been proven that people who work in a noisy environment suffer gradual hearing loss. If we set aside the difference in exposure time, there is not much difference between listening to Beethoven's Fifth symphony and working on an assembly line in terms of the effect on hearing. In fact, studies have shown that 37% of rock musicians and 52% of classical musicians experience measurable hearing loss.

Disrupted sleep also has a significant impact on health: poorer concentration, a greater risk of household accidents, reduced productivity and quality at work, fatigue during the day, and an impaired quality of life. Children who suffer from chronic disrupted sleep experience changes to their immune system, endocrine functions, etc. In order for an adult to get a good night's sleep, the WHO recommends a maximum noise level of 30 dBA.

Noise can also interfere with mental activities that require concentration, memory, and the ability to solve complex analytical problems. Recent statistics point to a link between high noise levels and high blood pressure, as well as ischemic heart disease. Children who are chronically exposed to loud sounds (because they live near an airport, for example) may experience impaired abilities in terms of learning to read, concentration, and problem-solving.

For parents, the growing number of noisy toys is a serious concern. Children often hold toys closer to their ears than designers intended, which can cause exposure to noise levels as high as 140 dB, which is the equivalent of an airplane taking off. Besides, 85% of toys exceed the legal Canadian safety limit of 75 dBA when used at a normal distance from the ear.

In light of its steady proliferation, noise is becoming an increasing concern in modern society. 83% of the complaints that municipal officials in New York City receive from the public are about noise, which ranks second in the United States among public concerns, ahead of crime, which comes in fourth. In Canada, residents of large cities like Montréal have moved to the suburbs over the past two decades seeking more tranquility, but the noise is now catching up to them, because they brought along their modern conveniences and motorized devices. When will we have peaceful cities and towns in Québec? When we do something about it!

The OOAQ's mission is to ensure the protection of the public and to work in the interest of Quebecers in the matter of communication and communication disorders. More than 1,300 speech-language pathologists and close to 250 audiologists are members of the Order.