

Aircraft Noise Measurement Report

Rock Ridge Rd.

Millersville, MD 21108

Prepared by Harris Miller Miller & Hanson, Inc.

August 2015

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1. INTRODUCTION

This memorandum presents the measured aircraft noise levels for the period of July 6 to July 20, 2015 at Rock Ridge Rd. Millersville, MD 21108. This residence is located approximately 5.7 miles southeast of the southeast end of Runway 15R/33L of Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI Marshall). Figure 1 shows the location of the measurement site (marked as BW229) relative to BWI Marshall. Measurement data were collected and analyzed on behalf of the Maryland Aviation Administration (MAA) by Harris Miller Miller & Hanson (HMMH) and Straughan Environmental (SE). The equipment was regularly checked for function and calibrated during the measurements. With the exception of brief periods during calibration, noise levels were monitored continuously throughout the measurement period.

At the conclusion of the measurement period, data were uploaded to the MAA's Noise and Operations Monitoring System (NOMS). The NOMS compared the times of loud noise events to its database of aircraft radar flight paths. Loud noise events which occurred while aircraft were passing within the vicinity were identified as aircraft noise. This matching of noise events to individual aircraft flights makes possible the calculation of the total aircraft noise exposure over a particular hour or day as well as the full measurement period. Additionally, the relative contribution of different aircraft types (e.g. jet aircraft, propeller aircraft, helicopters) or operations (e.g. arrivals, departures) to the total noise exposure can be computed.

Section 1 of this memorandum describes the measurement location. Section 2 presents information about the aircraft operations during the measurement period. Section 3 summarizes the measured noise levels. The appendix titled "How Do We Describe Aircraft Noise" provides background information on acoustical terms used in this memorandum.

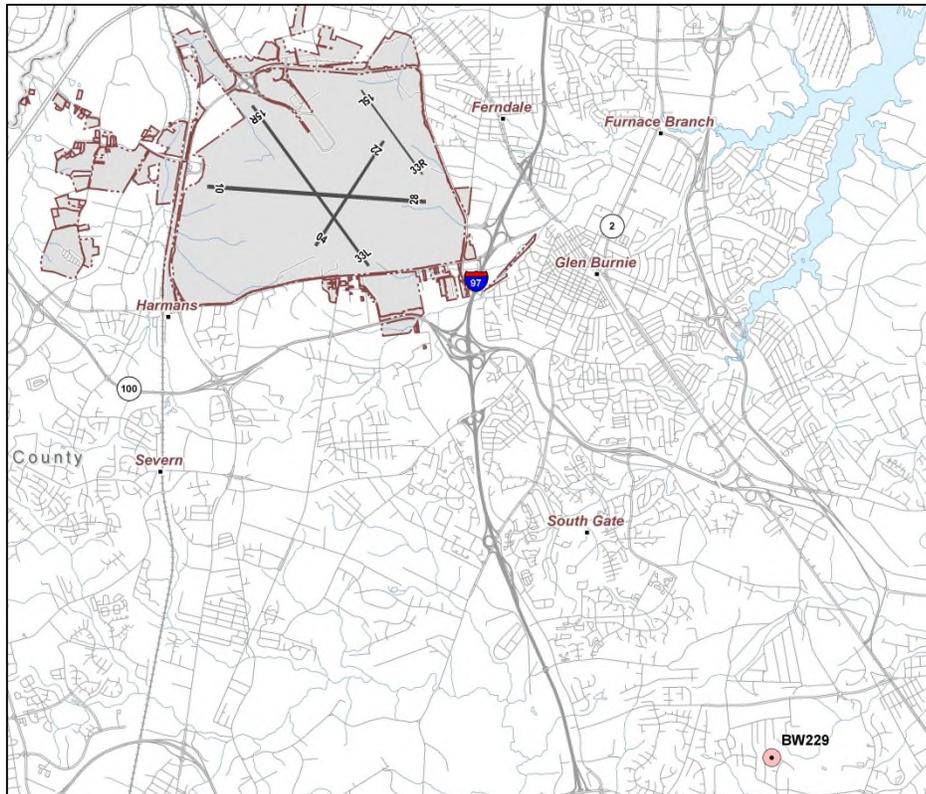


Figure 1. Noise Monitoring Location Map

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2. MEASUREMENT SITE

Aircraft noise levels were measured from the morning of July 6 to the morning of July 20, 2015 at Rock Ridge Rd. in Millersville. The noise monitor was placed in the backyard of the residence. Figure 2 shows the placement of the noise monitoring equipment.

The noise monitor is a Type I sound level meter and is regularly calibrated. Additionally, the system was calibrated every two to three days during the measurements during equipment checks. The equipment experienced no malfunctions and the meter was only stopped briefly for the periodic calibration checks.

Notable noise sources at this site include aircraft overflights, primarily arrivals to BWI Marshall, and typical suburban sounds such as local street traffic and birds.



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Figure 2. Noise Measurement Microphone

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3. AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS

The measurement site is located to the southeast of BWI Marshall approximately 1,800 feet east of the centerline of Runway 15R/33L. The primary aircraft noise events for this site are from arrivals to BWI Marshall Runway 33L. Other less common aircraft noise events are due to departures on BWI Marshall Runways 15R and 28.

During the measurement period, BWI Marshall operated in two configurations: departures on Runway 28 and arrivals on Runway 33L and departures on Runway 15R and arrivals on Runway 10. The most common configuration, departures on Runway 28 and arrivals on Runway 33L, was active for ten days during the measurement period. The configuration with departures on Runway 15R and arrivals on Runway 10 was active for one day during the measurement period. On four days, BWI Marshall operated in combinations of these configurations during different portions of the day. Table 1 in the Measured Noise Levels section includes a description of the primary arrival and departure runways for each day.



Figure 3 displays all BWI Marshall flight tracks for a typical day during the measurement period in west flow, which primarily utilizes Runway 28 for departures and Runway 33L for arrivals. The location of the measurement site is marked with its unique identifier in the NOMS, “BW229”. Figure 4 displays the same west flow flight tracks at a larger scale. Again, the text “BW229” shows the location of the measurement site.

In west flow, the primary BWI Marshall overflights were arrivals on Runway 33L which were 1,500 ft to 2,200 ft above ground level at their point of closest approach to the measurement site. The most common altitude was 1,800 ft. The majority of these flights were on runway centerline, approximately 1,800 ft to the southwest, at their point of closest approach to the measurement site. At a typical altitude of 1,800 ft, these flights on the runway centerline would be 45 degrees above the horizon.

As shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, aircraft arriving on Runway 33L come from all directions with their flight paths joining the runway centerline at various points. The primary factor in this variation in flight paths is the safe separation of aircraft within the sky. In order to safely space the aircraft in time and distance, air traffic controllers direct some planes to take more direct routes to the runway centerline while others are directed to longer paths. This complex choreography includes not only the arrivals to Runway 33L and all other aircraft in the air, but also every aircraft on the ground departing on Runway 28 due to the fact that these runways cross one another. Therefore, due to this complex choreography, though most arrivals to Runway 33L are on the runway centerline at their point of closest approach to the measurement site, a smaller number of arrivals fly more directly overhead.

Other overflights in west flow were from departures off of Runway 28. These departures were 5,100 ft to 8,400 ft above ground level at their point of closest approach to the measurement site. The most common altitude was 7,300 ft.

Figure 5 displays all BWI Marshall flight tracks for a typical day during the measurement period in east flow, which primarily utilizes Runway 15R for departures and Runway 10 for arrivals. Figure 6 displays the same flight tracks at a larger scale. In east flow, the primary BWI Marshall overflights were departures on Runway 15R which were 2,800 ft to 5,300 ft above ground level at their point of closest approach to the measurement site. The most common altitude was 3,900 ft.

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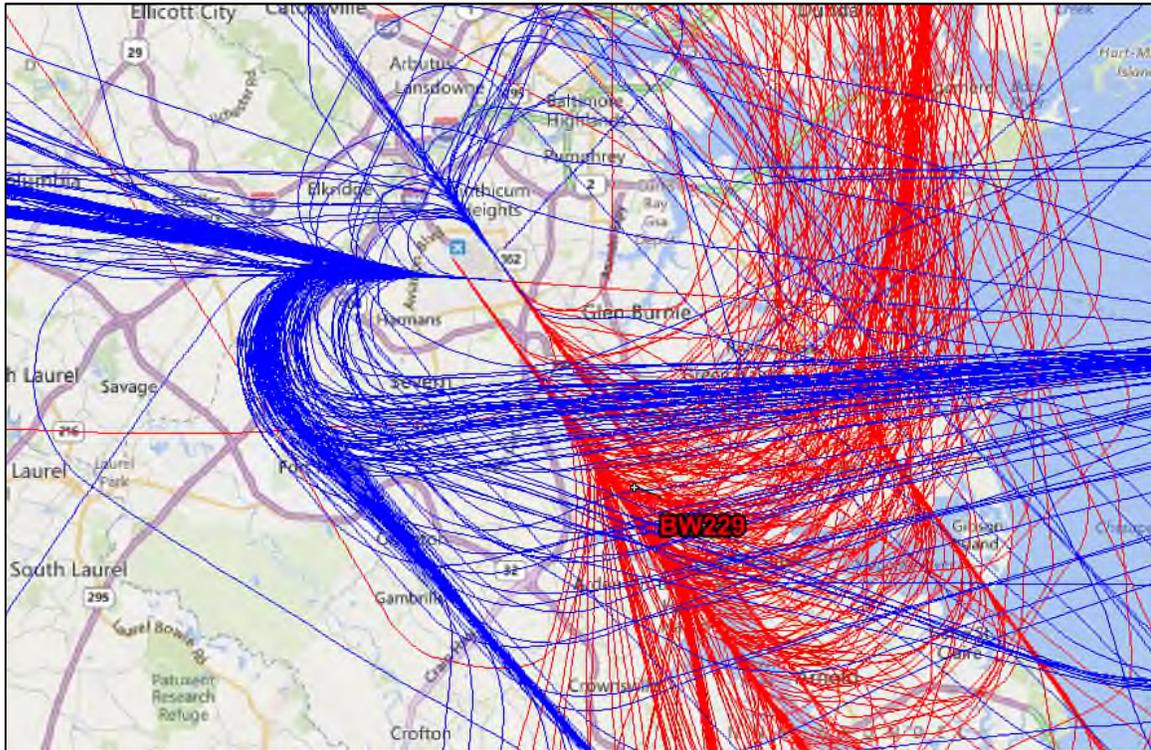


Figure 3. All Flight Tracks for a West Flow Day – July 10, 2015

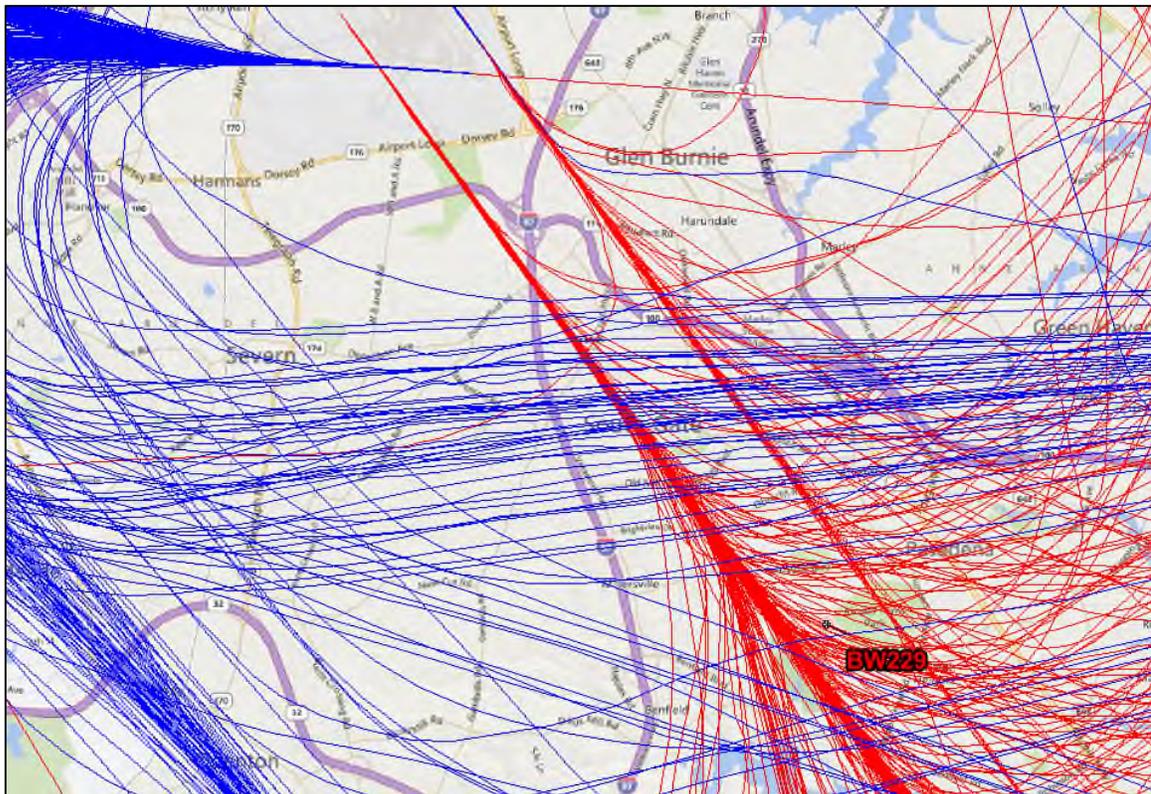


Figure 4. All Flight Tracks for a West Flow Day – July 10, 2015

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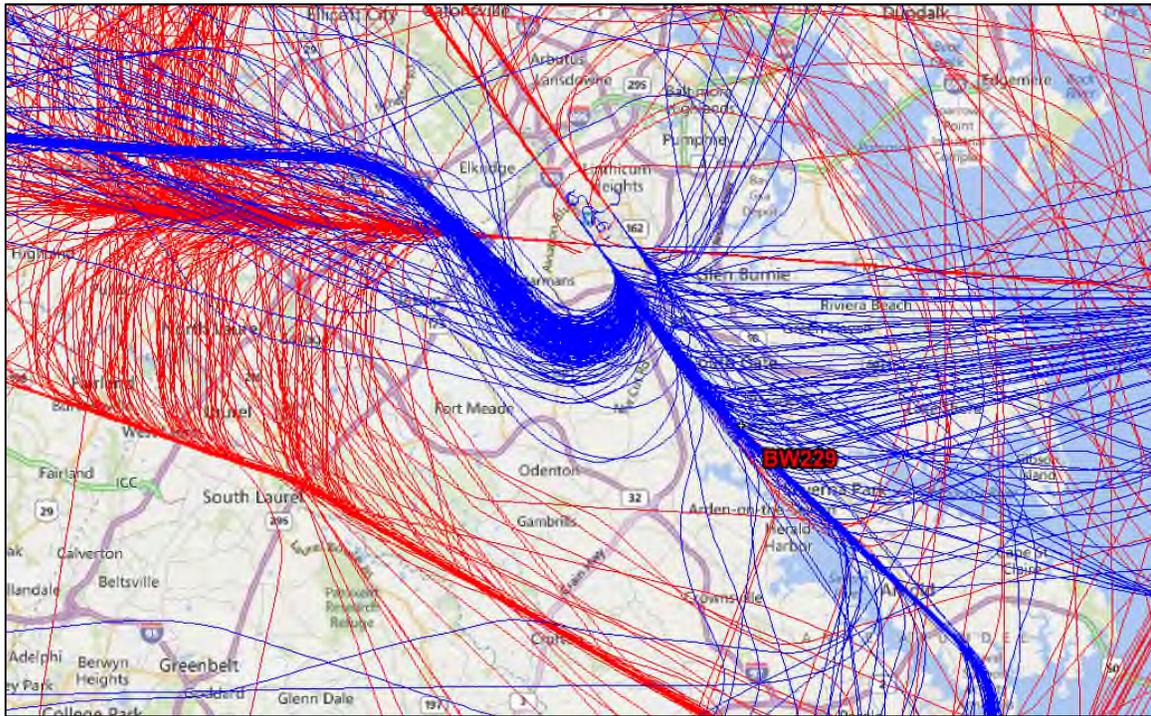


Figure 5. All Flight Tracks for an East Flow Day – July 6, 2015

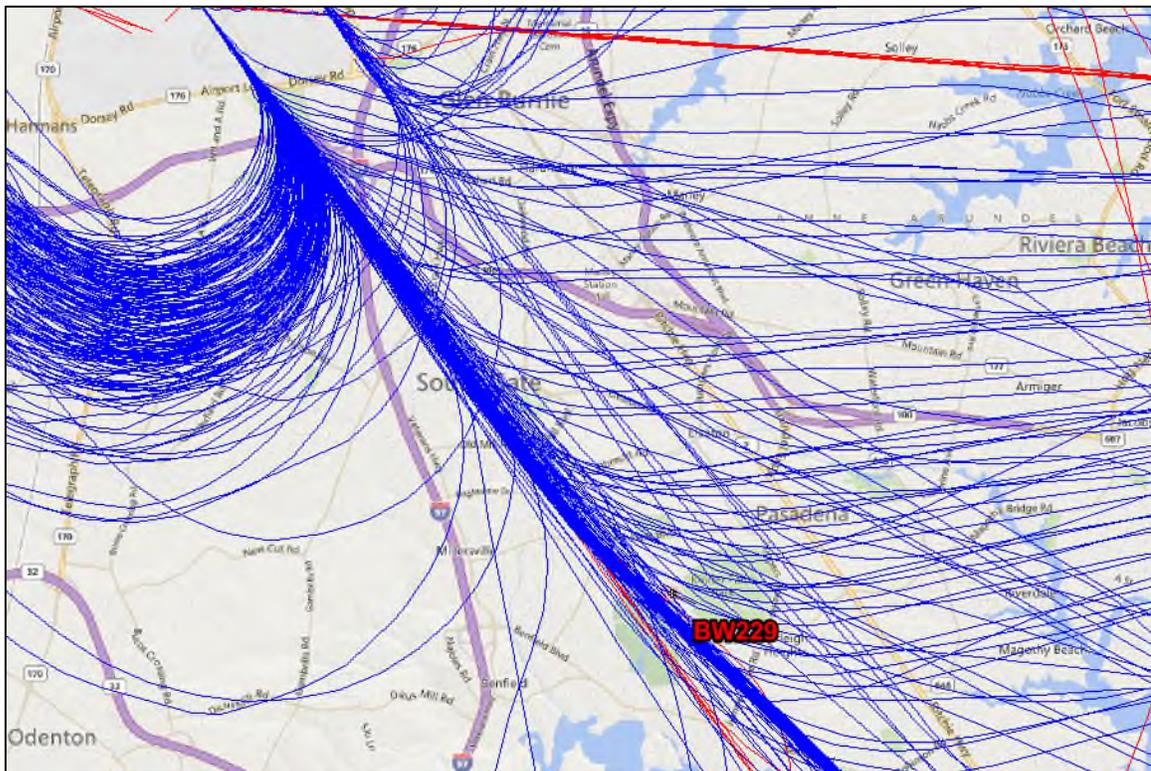


Figure 6. All Flight Tracks for a East Flow Day – July 6, 2015

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4. MEASURED NOISE LEVELS

This section provides an introduction to noise terminology, discusses the noise levels from individual aircraft noise events, and summarizes the cumulative noise exposure over the measurement period.

4.1 Aircraft Noise Terminology

There are several key metrics which are used to describe aircraft noise on a single-event and cumulative basis. The appendix titled “How Do We Describe Aircraft Noise” provides a more detailed overview of the metrics which are discussed in this section.

In brief, noise can be described by A-Weighted Sound Pressure Level¹ and is expressed in decibels (noted as dB or dBA). This noise level rises and falls from second to second as noise becomes louder or quieter. The average noise level over some time period, such as an hour, is called the Equivalent Sound Pressure Level (Leq). For a particular noise event, such as an aircraft overflight, the loudest level at any instant during the event is the Maximum A-Weighted Sound Pressure Level (Lmax). The Lmax tends to correlate poorly to people’s perception of the total “noisiness” of an event because it neglects the duration. The Sound Exposure Level (SEL) accounts for both the level and duration of the noise and is the best measure of the “noisiness” of a single event. Finally, the noise exposure over a complete day is represented by the Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL). This metric sums all of the noise exposure over the day with a ten decibel weighting for any noise which occurs during the nighttime (10 pm to 7 am) to account for the intrusive nature of these noise events.



4.2 Single Event Noise Levels

Figure 7 presents a count of noise events due to arrivals on Runway 33L at various Lmax values for the complete measurement period. For example, the tallest bar in the figure shows that 549 arrivals on Runway 33L had an Lmax of 68 dB. For typical conversational speech at a distance of approximately three feet, speech is interrupted by noise levels at or above 65 dB. Any noise events shown in this figure with a maximum level at or above 65 dB would, briefly for quieter events and longer for louder events, interrupt typical conversations outdoors. Figure 8 presents the counts of noise events due to departures on Runways 15R and 28 and other aircraft overflights not associated with BWI Marshall. Note that there were many fewer of these events and that the vertical scale of the graphic is very different than that of Figure 7.

Figure 9 and Figure 10 tell a similar story using the SEL metric which corresponds better to people’s judgment of the noisiness of an event. Arrivals to Runway 33L produced the largest number of loud noise events. Noise events from other aircraft operations, such as departures on Runways 15R and 28 were less common. Again note that the vertical scale of Figure 10 is very different than that of Figure 9.

Note that the focus of this study was louder aircraft noise events. Aircraft noise events with maximum levels at, near, or below the ambient noise levels from community noise sources are difficult, and sometimes impossible, to quantify and in most cases contribute little to the total noise exposure.

¹ A-Weighting simply refers to a method of computing the noise level which accounts for the particular response of the human ear. It is the standard for the vast majority of environmental noise analyses.

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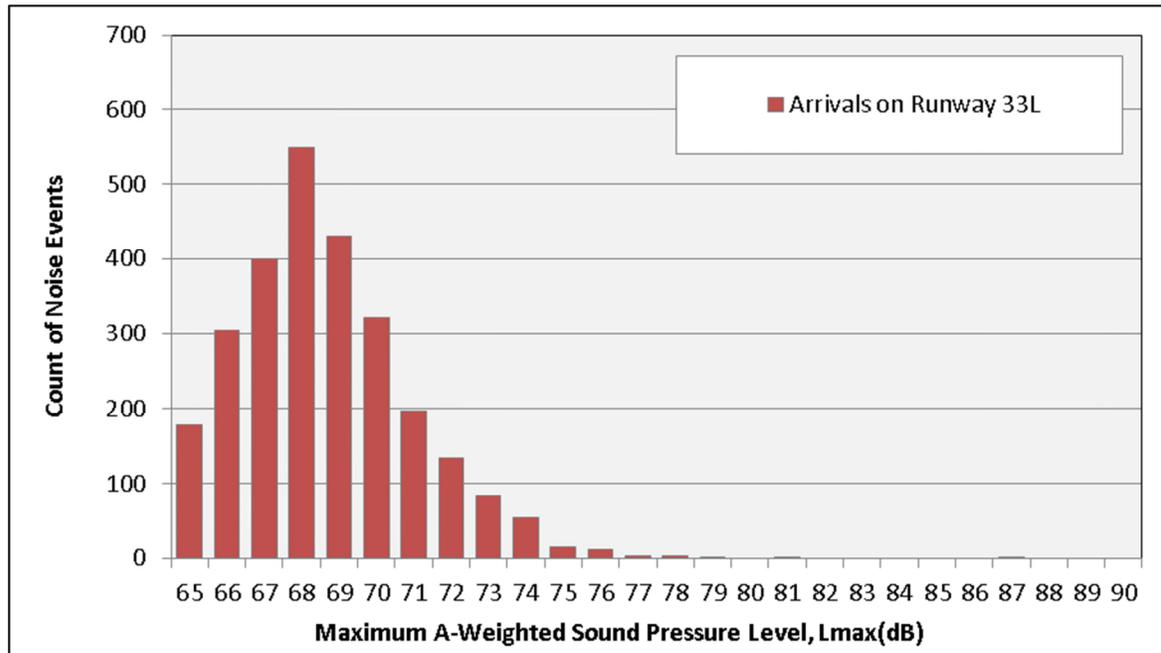


Figure 7. Counts of Maximum Noise Levels from Aircraft Overflights over the Full Measurement Period – Arrivals on Runway 33L

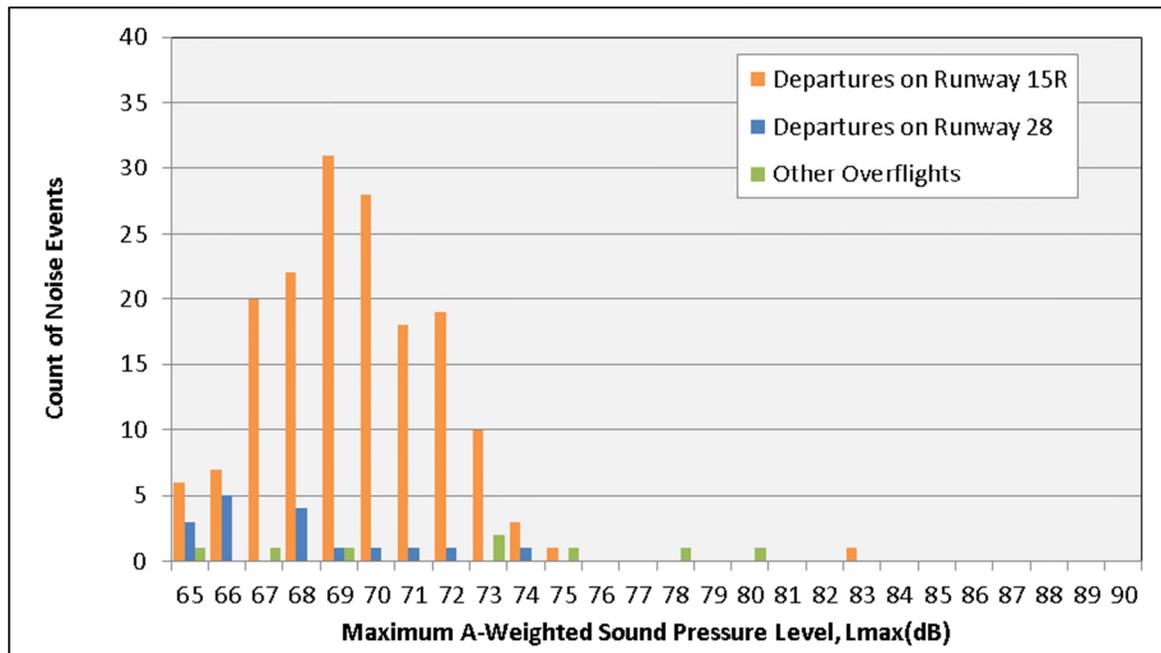


Figure 8. Counts of Maximum Noise Levels from Aircraft Overflights over the Full Measurement Period – Departures on Runways 15R and 28 and Other Aircraft Overflights

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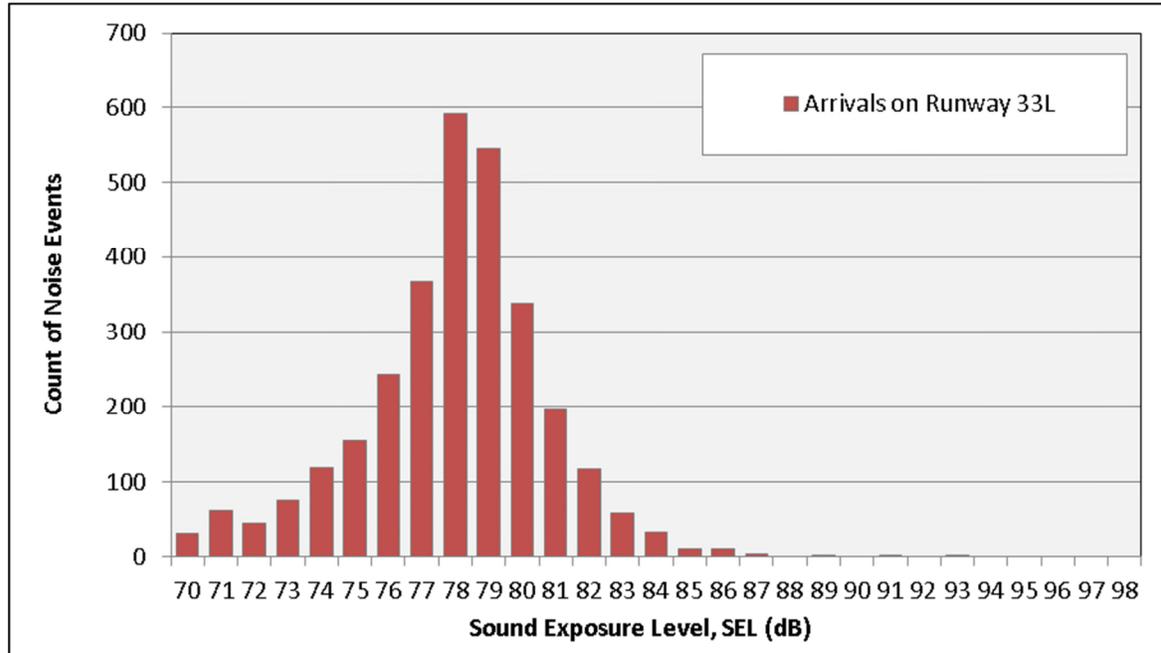


Figure 9. Counts of Sound Exposure Levels from Aircraft Overflights over the Full Measurement Period – Arrivals on Runway 33L

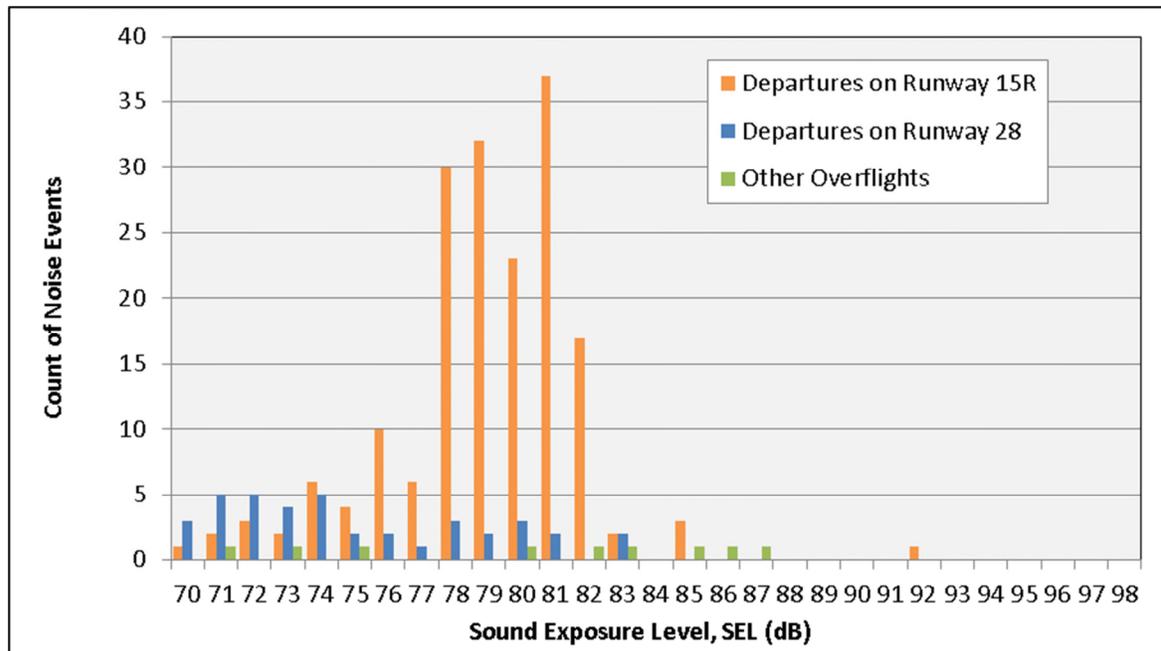


Figure 10. Counts of Sound Exposure Levels from Aircraft Overflights over the Full Measurement Period – Departures on Runways 15R and 28 and Other Aircraft Overflights

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4.3 Cumulative Noise Levels

Figure 11 provides a way to visualize the changes in aircraft noise levels over the measurement period. The average aircraft noise level (Leq) is presented on an hourly basis. Hours with louder or more aircraft events will show higher Leq values. Regions where the bars are absent simply indicate periods where no loud aircraft noise events occurred.

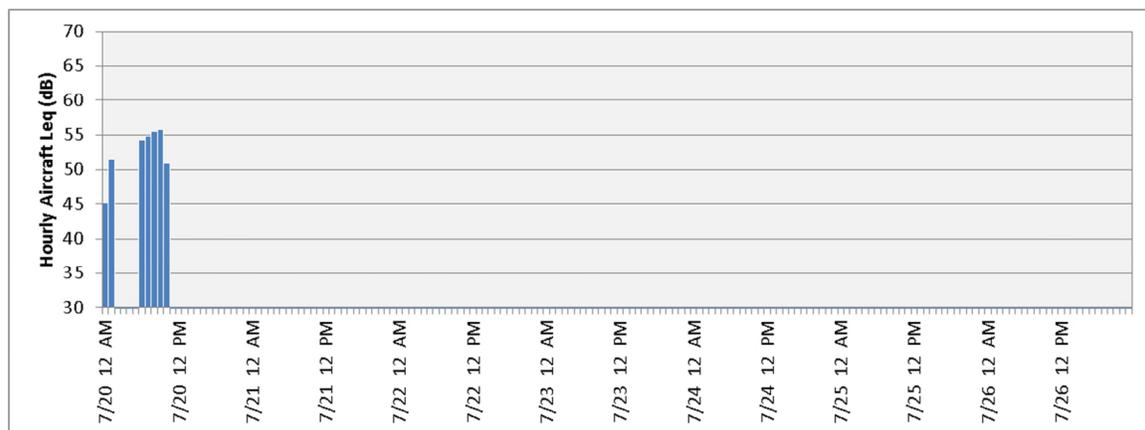
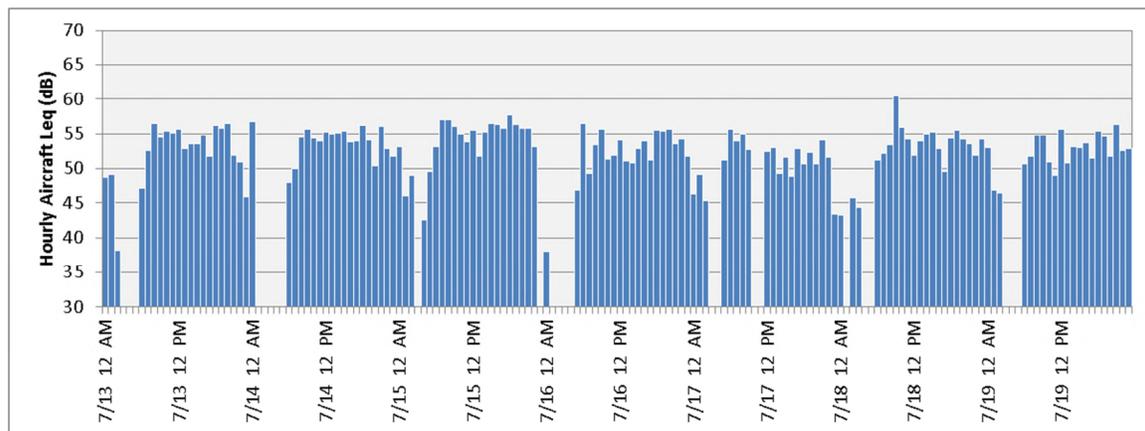
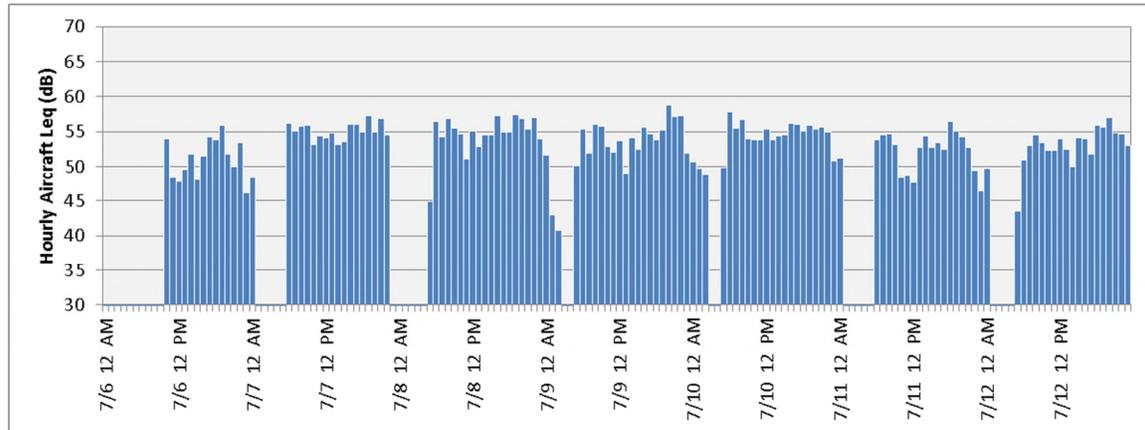


Figure 11. Average Hourly Aircraft Noise Levels

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Table 1 summarizes the cumulative noise exposure over each of the fifteen days of recorded data within the measurement period using the DNL metric. DNL sums the noise from every aircraft noise event over the day. The formula for DNL gives an extra ten decibel weighting to nighttime noise events to account for the intrusive nature of these events. The DNL for the thirteen complete days, as shown in Table 1, ranged from 55 dB to 59 dB.

The composite aircraft DNL over the full measurement period was 57 dB. The DNL over a full year will depend on the type and number of aircraft transiting the areas and utilizing BWI Marshall and percentage of time the airport spends in various operational configurations. Table 1 shows the primary runways in use each day of the measurement period.



Table 1. Measured Daily Aircraft Noise Levels

Date	Day-Night Average Sound Level, DNL (dB)	Hours Measured	Primary Aircraft Operations
7/6/2015	55*	14	10 Arr / 15R Dep
7/7/2015	57	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/8/2015	59	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/9/2015	59	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/10/2015	59	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/11/2015	55	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/12/2015	57	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/13/2015	55	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep 10 Arr / 15R Dep
7/14/2015	57	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/15/2015	58	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/16/2015	57	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/17/2015	56	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep 10 Arr / 15R Dep
7/18/2015	57	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/19/2015	57	24	33L Arr / 28 Dep
7/20/2015	57*	10	33L Arr / 28 Dep
Total	57	336	-

Notes:
* Measurements for a partial day may not represent the average noise level for the complete day.

As shown in the single event figures, Figure 7 through Figure 10, most of the loudest noise events at this site are from arrivals to Runway 33L. These arrivals accounted for about eighty-seven percent of the DNL over the period. Departures on Runway 15R contributed approximately ten percent of the total DNL over the period. Overflights not associated with BWI Marshall contributed approximately two percent of the total DNL over the period. Departures on Runway 28 contributed approximately one percent of the total DNL over the period.

How do we Describe Aircraft Noise?

We use a number of terms to describe aircraft noise. These metrics form the basis for the majority of noise analyses conducted at most airports in the U.S.

The Decibel, dB

All sounds come from a source – a musical instrument, a voice speaking, an airplane. The energy that produces these sounds is transmitted through the air in waves, or sound pressures, which impinge on the ear, creating the sound we hear.

The decibel is a ratio that compares the sound pressure of the sound source of interest (e.g., the aircraft over flight) to a reference pressure (the quietest sound we can hear). Because the range of sound pressures is very large, we use logarithms to simplify the expression to a smaller range, and express the resulting value in decibels (dB). Two useful rules of thumb to remember when comparing individual noise sources are: (1) most of us perceive a six to ten dB increase to be about a doubling of loudness, and (2) changes of less than about three dB are not easily detected outside of a laboratory.

The A-Weighted Decibel, dB(A)

Frequency, or “pitch”, is an important characteristic of sound. When analyzing noise, we are interested in how much is low-, middle-, and high-frequency noise. This breakdown is important for two reasons. First, our ears are better equipped to hear mid- and high-frequencies; thus, we find mid- and high-frequency noise more annoying. Second, engineering solutions to noise problems are different for different frequency ranges. The “A” filter approximates the sensitivity of our ear and helps us to assess the relative loudness of various sounds.

Maximum A-weighted Sound Level, L_{max}

A-weighted sound levels vary with time. For example, the sound increases as an aircraft approaches, then falls and blends into the background as the aircraft recedes into the distance. Figure 1 illustrates this phenomenon. We often describe a particular noise “event” by its maximum sound level (L_{max}). Figure 2 shows typical L_{max} values for some common noise sources. In fact, two events with identical L_{max} may produce very different total exposures. One may be of very short duration, while the other may be much longer.

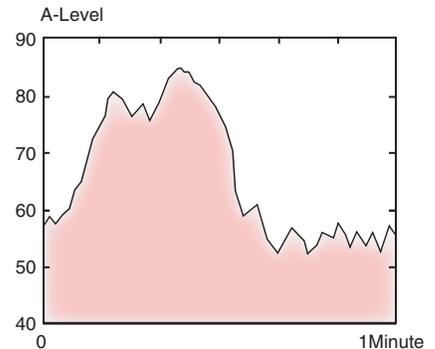


Figure 1. A-weighted Sound Levels Over Time

Sound Exposure Level, SEL

The most common measure of cumulative noise exposure for a single aircraft flyover is the Sound Exposure Level (SEL). Mathematically, it is the sum of the sound energy over the duration of a noise event – one can think of it as an equivalent noise event with a one-second duration. Figure 3 shows that portion of the sound energy included in this event. Because the SEL is normalized to one second, it will almost always be larger in magnitude than the L_{max} for the event. In fact, for most aircraft events, the SEL is about 7 to 12 dB higher than the L_{max}. Also, the fact that it is cumulative measure means that a higher SEL can result from either a louder or longer event, or some combination.

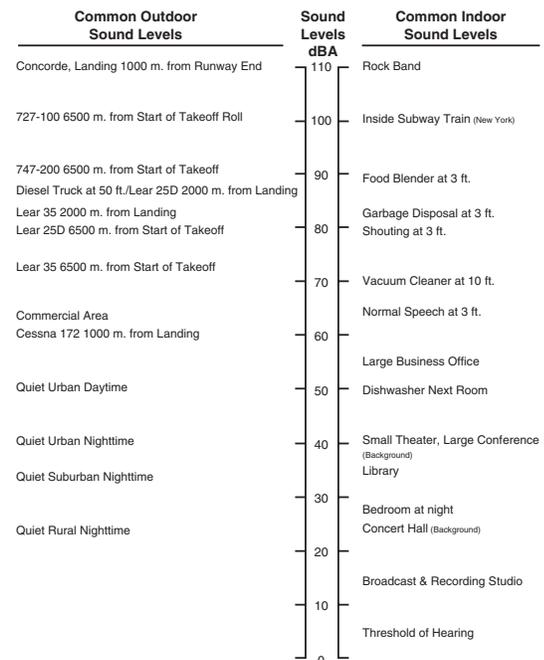


Figure 2. Common Environmental Sound Levels

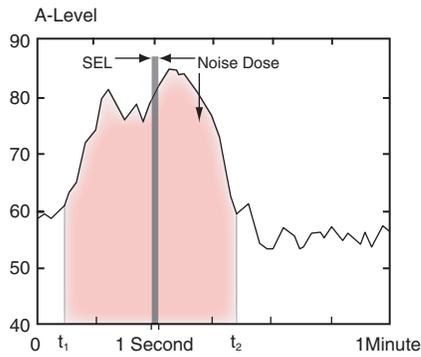


Figure 3. Sound Exposure Level

SEL provides a comprehensive way to describe noise events for use in modeling and comparing noise environments. Computer noise models base their computations on SEL values.

Day-Night Average Sound Level, DNL

The Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) represents noise as it occurs over a 24-hour period, with the assumption noise events occurring at night (10 p.m. to 7 a.m.) are 10 dB louder than they really are. This 10 dB penalty is applied to account for greater sensitivity to nighttime noise, and the fact that events at night are often perceived to be more intrusive because nighttime ambient noise is less than daytime ambient noise.

Figure 4 depicts a hypothetical daily noise dose. The top frame repeats the one-minute noise exposure that was shown in Figure 1. The center frame includes this one-minute interval within a full hour; now the shaded area represents the noise during that hour with 16 noise events, each producing an SEL. Finally, the bottom frame includes the one-hour interval within a full 24 hours. Here the shaded area represents the listener's noise dose over a full day.

DNL normally can be measured with standard monitoring equipment or predicted with computer models.

Most aircraft noise studies utilize computer-generated estimates of DNL, determined by accounting for all of the SELs from individual events which comprise the total noise dose at a given location on the ground.

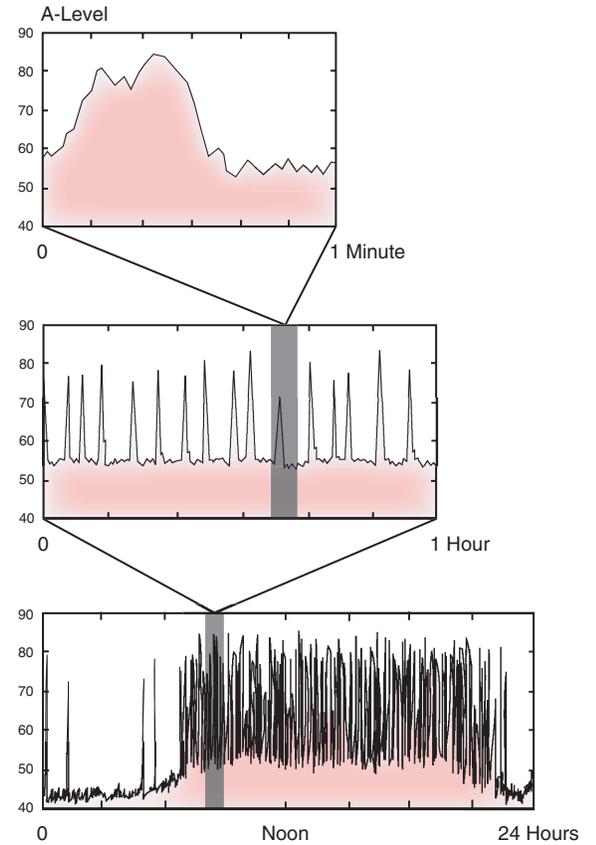


Figure 4. Daily Noise Dose

Computed values of DNL are often depicted as noise contours reflecting lines of equal exposure around an airport (much as topographic maps indicate contours of equal elevation). DNL contours usually reflect annual average operating conditions, taking into account the average number of flights each day, how often each runway is used throughout the year, and where over the surrounding communities the aircraft normally fly.



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