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Aircraft noise effects on sleep: application of the results of a large polysomnographic field study

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Abstract

The Institute of Aerospace Medicine at the German Aerospace Center (DLR) investigated the influence of nocturnal aircraft noise on sleep in polysomnographic laboratory and field studies between 1999 and 2004. The results of the field studies were used by the Regional Council of Leipzig (Germany) for the establishment of a noise protection plan in the official approval process for the expansion of Leipzig/Halle airport. Methods and results of the DLR field study are described in detail. Special attention is given to the dose-response relationship between the maximum sound pressure level of an aircraft noise event and the probability to wake up, which was used to establish noise protection zones directly related to the effects of noise on sleep. These protection zones differ qualitatively and quantitatively from zones that are solely based on acoustical criteria. The noise protection plan for Leipzig/Halle airport is presented and substantiated: (1) on average, there should be less than one additional awakening induced by aircraft noise, (2) awakenings recalled in the morning should be avoided as much as possible, and (3) aircraft noise should interfere as little as possible with the process of falling asleep again. Issues concerned with the representativeness of the study sample are discussed.

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