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15 April 2020

Hon. Doug Ford  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building, Queen's Park.  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

**Did Public Health Experts Deem Residential Construction an Essential Workplace under COVID-19 Restrictions, and Recommend Overriding City Noise By-law in Connection with Construction?**

Dear Premier Ford:

We applaud the many serious actions your government has taken to reduce the impact and the spread of this novel coronavirus. We do have questions, however, regarding residential construction and noise by-laws.

To fight the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that decisions are in the interest of public health and saving lives. **Were your decisions to 1) declare residential construction sites as essential workplaces and 2) to override the municipal noise by-law, made on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health?**

**1) Residential Construction Deemed Essential?** There is a risk of COVID-19 infection to workers if residential construction is allowed to continue and expand. Construction sites require a large number of contractors working in close proximity to one another, making physical distancing very challenging. The use of port-o-potties is not prohibited and running water is not required, making it difficult to follow hygiene practices recommended to limit the spread of COVID-19. And the risks do not stop at the construction site: construction workers have families, friends, and neighbours who could be impacted.

Further, many construction sites are adjacent to, or within, existing residential communities. The wording of the updated Essential Workplaces list would allow construction to continue on apartment infill projects and refurbishments within buildings themselves, exposing adjacent residents to potential infection.

**2) Relaxing the Construction Noise By-law?** We respectfully request that you reinstate provisions of the Noise By-Law applying to Construction in [Ontario Regulation 130/20](#) of the City of Toronto Act.

Overriding the noise by-law harms public health by increasing the hours the public is exposed to excessively loud construction noise. Furthermore, excessive noise is a health hazard as noted in

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Toronto Public Health's *How Loud is too Loud? Health Impacts of Environmental Noise in Toronto*.<sup>1</sup> It states:

*“The growing body of evidence indicates that exposure to excessive environmental noise does not only impact quality of life and cause hearing loss but also has other health impacts, such as cardiovascular effects, cognitive impacts, sleep disturbance and mental health effects.”*

The City's noise by-law permits construction equipment to operate Monday to Friday 7 am to 7 pm, Saturdays 9 am to 7 pm, and not at all on Sundays and statutory holidays. Allowing construction equipment to operate from 6 am to 10 pm, 7 days a week including holidays, is illogical at a time when people are being asked to stay home. Studies indicate that enduring constant noise such as construction noise which is a typical intense noise stressor, will impact the physical and mental health, and quality of life of all residents.<sup>1-11</sup>

Noise also has negative economic impacts. According to University of Michigan researcher Richard Neitzel<sup>2</sup>:

*“Just a five-decibel reduction in excess noise could reduce hypertension cases by an estimated 1.2 million and coronary heart disease cases by 279,000, research shows. That equates to an annual economic benefit of \$3.9 billion, with \$2.4 billion coming from direct health care costs and \$1.5 billion from productivity gains....This demonstrates that environmental noise has significant negative economic ramifications.”*

We request that you immediately **remove inclusion of residential construction from the Essential Workplaces list and leave Toronto's noise by-law in place**, thereby protecting workers and the public during this unprecedented pandemic in accordance with medical health research and recommendations.

Sincerely,

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## Did Public Health Experts Deem Residential Construction an Essential Workplace under COVID-19 Restrictions, and Recommend Overriding City Noise By-law in Connection with Construction?

### References:

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- <sup>2</sup>*Economic Impact of Hearing Loss and Reduction of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss in the United States*, (2017) RL Neitzel et al. J Speech Lang Hear Res 60:1. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28056138/>
- <sup>3</sup>*Evidence for Environmental Noise Effects on Health for the United Kingdom Policy Context: A Systematic Review of the Effects of Environmental Noise on Mental Health, Wellbeing, Quality of Life, Cancer, Dementia, Birth, Reproductive Outcomes, and Cognition*, Clark, Crumpler, Notley, (2020) Int J Environ Res Public Health 17:2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31936110>
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- <sup>5</sup>*Is Noise Pollution the Next Big Public Health Crisis?* David Owen, The New Yorker, May 9, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/05/13/is-noise-pollution-the-next-big-public-health-crisis>
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- <sup>11</sup>*An Invisible Threat*, Alex Piazza. (2020) University of Michigan Research. <https://www.research.umich.edu/news-issues/michigan-research/invisible-threat>