

Study to determine if jet noise ruining health

Researchers have found link between night flights and hypertension

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[Enlarge](#)

Jean Dandurand, 81, holds a sound meter outside his Dorval home to measure the noise levels of the jets.

Residents of Dorval, Pointe Claire and St. Laurent have complained for years that the roar of jets flying in and out of Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport affects their quality of life. Now, a comprehensive public health study, the first of its kind in Montreal, is to determine whether jet noise also affects the health of residents in these communities and in other neighbourhoods affected by air traffic from the Dorval airport. The study is being conducted by the city of Montreal's public health department and its environmental health unit, Marie Pinard, a spokesperson for the public health board, confirmed yesterday. Pinard was reluctant to comment about what the study might find. "We will have results to release to the public only in about six months time," she said.

What is known is that the health board's research team has collected Aéroports de Montréal's (ADM) soundscape data, including records of noise level testing on the ground. The health authority has also asked for patient records from Centre de santé et de services sociaux units across the island of Montreal. Many of those regional health organizations follow residents living in airport-affected neighbourhoods.

News of the study was welcomed yesterday by residents and municipal officials, many of whom have been demanding public health authorities get involved. "This summer was absolutely intolerable," Town of Mount Royal Mayor Vera Danyluk said. She said she lost track of the number of residents who called her office with complaints and concerns about their health and property values.

A public health study is long overdue, Danyluk added. For the past three years, the ADM has used six microphones in neighbourhoods around the Dorval airport and a roving mobile recording unit to collect data on noise levels on the ground. ADM's noise-abatement policy states the airport authority aims to keep jet noise in communities surrounding the airport at no higher than 70 decibels, a level believed to pose no risk to public health. But Danyluk and others have complained that results from ADM's noise-level testing are not available to the public and only the airport authority knows where and in which communities levels exceed 70 decibels.

"Residents are convinced there is a link between the airport and their health problems," said Noushig Eloyan, a Montreal city councillor for Bordeaux-Cartierville ward.

In recent months, night flights out of Trudeau airport have drawn complaints, petitions and public protests. A flight path introduced by ADM in September 2006 was supposed to decrease the number of neighbourhoods overflowed between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. But the flight path for nighttime use proved difficult for many pilots and brought jet traffic to new neighbourhoods.

Residents in several areas of Greater Montreal, including Saraguay, Cartierville, Laval, Ahuntsic and Town of Mont Royal, teamed up with residents from Dorval, Pointe Claire and St. Laurent to complain that their sleep was being disrupted and their health damaged.

Those concerns intensified this year with the release of a major European study linking night flights to high blood pressure, or hypertension. Researchers at Imperial College London discovered that loud noise, especially from aircraft, instantly boosts a sleeping person's blood pressure. The study of nearly 5,000 people living near Heathrow International Airport in London and three other major European airports found that an increase in nighttime airplane noise of 10 decibels increased the risk of hypertension by 14 per cent in men and women alike. People with high blood pressure are at a greater risk of developing heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and dementia, it said.

Jean Dandurand of Dorval said he was happy to learn of the Montreal health study and hopeful it might lead to a decrease in airport traffic, especially night and early morning flights. The 81-year-old said he had to move out of his house this summer to get the sleep necessary to recover from open-heart surgery. He said he now regularly tests his blood pressure and the decibel count of jets flying overhead. Of the ADM's testing of noise levels on behalf of the public, he said: "You can't let the fox guard the chicken coop."