

ANEC in brief

ANEC is the European consumer voice in standardisation, representing and defending consumer interests in the development of technical standards, in the application of certification schemes to standards and in the creation or revision of legislation on products and services. ANEC brings together national consumer organisations from the EU Member States and EFTA countries in order to define European positions on matters affecting consumer protection and welfare. ANEC receives funding from the European Commission's DG SANCO and the EFTA Secretariat. It relies too on the participation of volunteer experts which is considered a contribution in kind.

Consumer participation in standardisation is crucial. Consumer representation complements the business view, and goods and services based on standards developed with effective consumer participation can be more easily accepted in the market place. In the EU context, consumers ensure that the public interest is represented in the standardisation work that complements European legislation and broader public policy initiatives.

European Association for the Co-ordination of Consumer Representation in Standardisation, aisbl

Avenue de Tervuren 32, box 27
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium
Phone +32 2 743 24 70
Fax + 32 2 706 54 30
anec@anec.eu – www.anec.eu

 <http://companies.to/anec/>

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Raising Standards for Consumers



**PUMP DOWN THE
VOLUME!**

Background

According to scientists, 5-10% of PMP listeners risk permanent hearing loss if they listen to a personal music player for more than 1h per day each week at high volume settings (more than 89 decibels) for at least 5 years. Given the widespread use of such devices in recent years, it is estimated that 2,5 to 10 million consumers are at risk. At the moment, no technical standard defines a maximum sound limit for PMPs. Those now on the market can generate a sound level as high as 115 dB(A). By comparison, pedestrians are exposed to a sound

level of 90 dB(A) from passing heavy traffic. Hearing loss from exposure to noise from PMPs is an avoidable risk, unlike hearing loss due to ageing or illness, as it depends on the level of such noise. And the level can be changed. But the damages caused by such exposure can be permanent and irreversible. Therefore, ANEC believes that prevention is imperative.



How to enhance the safety of PMPs?

Having sufficient and adequate information about the safety of music players consumers intend to buy, is an essential consumer need. Information should be reliable, understandable and transparent. However, warnings and labels are increasingly used as substitutes for requiring a manufacturer to put safe products on the market, thus putting the burden of protecting themselves on consumers. In ANEC's opinion, warnings and labels should only be complementary to strict safety measures.

Setting safety by default

Sound limits need at least to be specified at a noise level acceptable according to the latest scientific opinions. And bearing in mind that it is difficult for consumers to know exactly the decibels they are listening their PMPs to, and that young consumers might not be spontaneously receptive to cautionary measures due to their young age, the safest sound levels for short and long time exposure should be provided by default in personal music players as they are sold in the shops.

What is ANEC doing?

Since May 2008 ANEC has proposed safe sound limits in the draft standard IEC 62368 Audio/Video, Information and Communication Technology Equipment – Safety – Requirements. However, although these lower values were supported by several countries, the setting of limits was refused and a warning in the instruction was required instead. In January 2009, we issued a position paper calling for the revision of the relevant standards in order to ensure the hearing of future generations. In June 2009, the European Commission requested for those standards to be revised and standardisation work, to which ANEC actively participates in CENELEC TC 108X WG 3, has started since. In addition to limits related to time-exposure proposed by the EC, ANEC asks for a sound limit of 89 dB(A) to be the maximum permitted by default in PMPs, with secured access to a second maximum of 100 dB(A). The latter could be used only after deliberate manual activation via a password and is intended, for example, for people with hearing impairments to be able to increase the volume. In the case of PMPs designed to appeal to children, we wish to see the maximum sound level fixed at a level below that where the probability of risking hearing loss is considered negligible.