

Background

Whether or not something is “too loud” is a judgment that varies with each listener. The decision is influenced by many factors like content and style, the speaker’s voice and tone, background sounds, and music.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) does not regulate the volume of programs or commercials. FCC rules limit the amount of power that a station can transmit and the peak level of the program material. Within these limitations, however, broadcasters and program producers have considerable latitude to vary the “loudness” of the program material.

Equipment That Helps

More television receivers are now equipped with circuits that are designed to stabilize loudness differences between programs and commercials. These functions usually need to be “enabled” or turned on through the television receiver’s “Set up/Audio” menu. The “Mute” button on TV remote controls is also useful to “blank” excessively loud audio. Manually controlling volume levels with the remote control remains the simplest approach to reducing excessive volume levels. In “high-end” equipment, such as home theater systems, some automatic devices may also help. They include:

- **Automatic Gain Control (AGC) Circuits** raise the audio level if it is too low, and lower it if it is too high.
- **Audio Compressors** can tone down loud sounds. Compressors can be adjusted to eliminate many of the negative effects of loudness.

Equipment That Helps (cont’d)

- **Limiters and Peak Limiters** can keep the audio level from exceeding a pre-determined level. Peak limiters are the simplest, least intrusive of all the automatic level control devices, but can introduce considerable distortion.
- **Audio Expanders** increase the range of sound. An expander can restore sound to its normal range and also reduce noticeable background noise.
- **Audio Filters** can “screen out” specific audio frequencies.

If You Have A Complaint

Under most circumstances, it is in the interest of broadcasters to use equipment and procedures to avoid “loud” commercials and background noise. If you have a complaint about “loud” commercials and background noise, contact the station(s) involved. You should identify each message of concern by the sponsor or product’s name and by the date and time of the broadcast.

(More)
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