

## Navy noise complaint data lost in glitches

### The lost data came to light when Citizens of Ebey's Reserve requested noise complaint records.

By Jessie Stensland

Monday, June 28, 2021 10:45pm **Whidbey NEWS Times**

Separate computer problems at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island resulted in the loss of years of public records and the inadvertent disabling of an email address for citizens to register aircraft noise complaints, resulting in months of messages being lost in the ether of cyberspace.

The problems publicly came to light after the anti-aircraft-noise activist group Citizens of Ebey's Reserve, commonly known as COER, submitted a Freedom of Information Act request for telephone and email noise complaints and received a response that some data had been lost.

In an email to the newspaper, a base spokesperson explained that a computer hard drive crash caused the base to lose emails that Navy personnel sent in response to citizens complaints up to October 2020. The complaints themselves were stored separately and backed up.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, the lost documents would have been accessible to the public.

In August 2020, the base underwent a station-wide computer system upgrade that caused the email address for complaints to be disabled. Although complaints are reviewed each day, the Navy spokesperson reported that it took base personnel six months to realize the email address wasn't working and that a new address was set up immediately after discovering the problem.

Base officials set up a new comment address, [comments@navy.mil](mailto:comments@navy.mil), as well as a phone line, at 360-257-6665, that residents can use to register their concerns, according to the Navy.

The complaints submitted to the address between August 2020 and February 2021 were not received by the base.

COER claimed that the Navy knew about the email address problem immediately and didn't fix the problem until the group complained in February.

"This strange failure of the Navy's technology and their foot-dragging attention to fixing problems seems to reveal a disingenuous interest in providing reliable communications with the public," said Bob Wilbur, COER president.

Wilbur estimated that about 7,380 email and voice complaints about noise from the EA-18G Growler aircraft were sent in 2020, although the Navy reports receiving half that. The communities that registered the most complaints were Coupeville, Port Townsend and Oak Harbor, but the Navy also received them from communities as geographically distant as the Olympic Peninsula, Camano Island, La Conner, Anacortes, the San Juan Islands and South Whidbey.

According to the base, the purpose of the noise complaint system is to ensure that aircraft operations comply with FAA regulations and base operating procedures to minimize the effect the noise has on neighboring communities. The EA-18G Growler aircraft, for example, has practice routes described in an Environmental Impact Statement.

Each complaint is thoroughly analyzed and a response is recommended.

"When necessary, the base officials may communicate directly with the complainant," the Navy explained.