



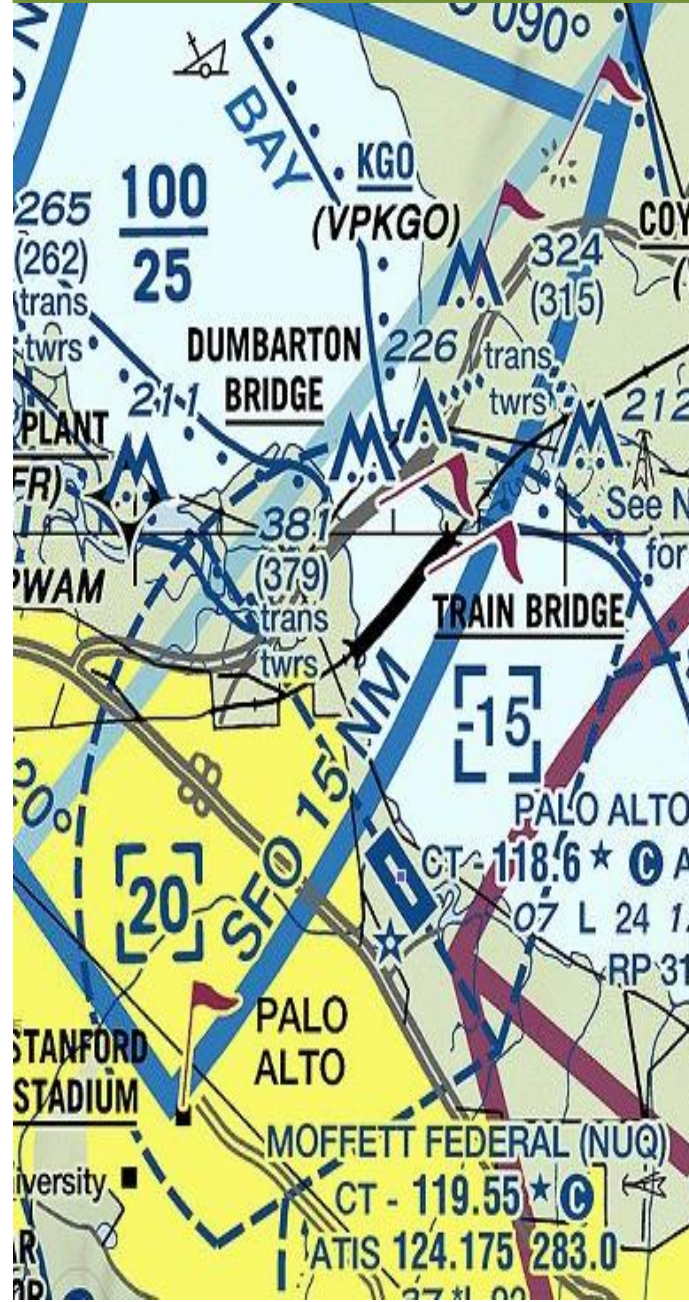
# PALO ALTO AIRPORT

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

## 2023 ANNUAL NOISE REPORT

(January 2023 to  
December 2023)

**Vision:** Palo Alto Airport strives to balance the interests of pilots to fly with the interests of neighbors in a peaceful living environment. This document is a report of the noise complaints received by the airport in 2023. Airport staff uses this information to identify trends within Palo Alto and neighboring communities. These trends inform communications between airport staff and pilots on the issue of noise.



## Introduction:

The following is a report on noise-related operations and complaints received by Palo Alto Airport (PAO) in 2023. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) defines air travel routes and procedures, including defining separation distances between aircraft, determining hazards to aviation and all other safety criteria for aircraft, and is responsible for directing and enforcing the movement of aircraft in flight. Although organizations can petition the FAA regarding flight procedures, the FAA has the final say in what is safe and acceptable. The Airport Noise and Capacity Act (ANCA) of 1990 federally prohibits public-use airports from restricting airspace.

The FAA measures noise based on the Yearly Day and Night Average Sound Level (DNL) and the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL). While both are essentially the same, airports in California use the CNEL method to measure noise. CNEL is a method of averaging single event aircraft noise into a weighted 24-hour average. The system adds penalties to all events occurring during the evening (7pm – 10pm) and the night (10pm – 7am). The Santa Clara County Airport Land Use Commission (SCC ALUC) performed a noise study for the Palo Alto Airport using the CNEL to determine the noise contours for 55, 60, 65, and 70 decibels. The contour map is included as **Attachment A**.

Regarding safety and altitude, the FAA has in place Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs) that establish Minimum Safe Altitudes (MSAs) for aircraft. For fixed wing aircraft, the MSA is 1,000 feet above ground when over congested areas and 500 feet when not over congested areas. These MSAs apply to all fixed wing aircraft except when necessary for landing and takeoff operations. Helicopters are exempt from these altitude restrictions due to the nature of their flight. These minimum altitudes are enforced by the FAA Flight Standards District Office in San Jose, not by Palo Alto Airport. Palo Alto Airport cannot tell pilots when or where to fly; the Airport, however, does have voluntary noise abatement procedures that Palo Alto Airport recommends that pilots follow. (See the Noise Abatement Procedures section below.)

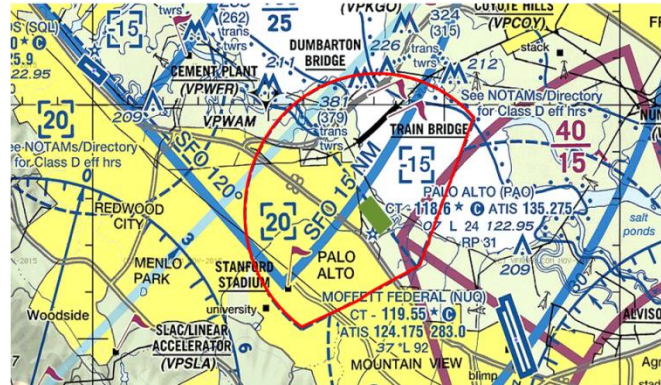
The Airport receives noise complaints via email at [pao@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:pao@cityofpaloalto.org) and a noise complaint hotline 650-329-2405. Airport staff review and timely respond to all complaints, ascertaining information from complainants including contact information, date, time, and description of the occurrence. Various flight trackers can be used to help identify the aircraft involved and verify if FAA regulations or Palo Alto Airport procedures were violated. The Airport staff reviews and compiles all data to determine trends with flying activities.

### Purpose:

The purpose of the Palo Alto Airport Annual Noise Report is to identify noise trends in the surrounding areas and determine compliance with established voluntary noise abatement procedures.

### Airspace:

The Palo Alto Airport airspace is unique. The congested Bay Area airspace is dominated by SFO Class Bravo airspace, which encompasses a 30 nautical mile radius around SFO. Underneath the Class Bravo airspace lays the Class Charlie airspace of Oakland and San Jose international Airports. Finally, Moffett Airfield lies approximately 4 nautical miles to the southeast of Palo Alto Airport.



Palo Alto Airport Sectional Map  
Palo Alto Airport in Green  
PAO Airspace highlighted in Red

Source: <http://vfrmap.com/?type=vfrc&lat=37.461&lon=-122.115&zoom=10>

As a result, Palo Alto Airport airspace ends only 1.5 nautical miles southeast of the Palo Alto Airport's single runway (Runway 13/31). To land at Palo Alto Airport, aircraft must turn before entering Moffett's airspace, resulting in aircraft having to space themselves in traffic patterns over the peninsula when take-off/landing volumes peak. The FAA's Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) at Palo Alto Airport has a letter of agreement with Moffett's ATCT providing Palo Alto Airport aircraft with extensions into Moffett airspace when Moffett airfield is not in use. The additional airspace is a useful mitigation tool during busy times.

Further restrictions in Palo Alto Airport airspace come from San Jose Class C airspace, starting at 1,500 feet Mean Sea Level, just southeast of Palo Alto Airport and SFO Class B airspace, starting at 2,500 feet Mean Sea Level, just northeast of the Palo Alto Airport. Both are identified on the Palo Alto Airport Sectional Map: San Jose Class C is shown with thick magenta lines and SFO Class B is shown with thick blue lines. These restrictions play a vital role in aircraft departures, in turn influencing noise abatement procedures for the Palo Alto Airport.

### Noise Abatement Procedures:

Noise abatement procedures are voluntary procedures that the Airport asks pilots to follow. The Airport is prohibited from restricting airspace. Palo Alto Airport staff will speak with individual pilots and educate them about the voluntary noise abatement procedures. The Palo Alto Airport cannot levy fines on pilots that violate the voluntary noise procedures. For illustrated noise abatement procedures reference Palo Alto Airport Pilots Handout included as **Attachment B**.

The noise abatement procedures depend on the runway that is in use at the time. Depending on weather patterns, aircraft can depart on Runway 31 to the northwest or Runway 13 to the southeast. Approximately 90% of the time, weather conditions require the use of Runway 31. Pilots are asked to not make a left crosswind departure from Runway 31, but instead make a "Left Dumbarton Departure" (fly to the Dumbarton Auto Bridge before making a left turn and flying over East Palo Alto) or a right 270 degree turn before departing to the south or west. When aircraft are using Runway 13, pilots are asked to make

a left 270-degree turn. In addition to these procedures, pilots are asked to climb to 1,500 feet or above ground before crossing Highway 101 and reduce power when safely able.

For arrivals, it is standard practice and necessary for pilots to descend to pattern altitude before entering the traffic pattern around PAO, sometimes requiring aircraft to descend below the 1,500 feet minimum of departing aircraft over Palo Alto. As these aircraft are descending to land the engines are generally powered back and quieter than ascending aircraft.

Airport staff continuously engages with tenants and pilots about the voluntary noise abatement procedures, always noting that safety always supersedes noise.

#### Findings:

The Palo Alto Airport remains one of the busiest general aviation Airports in the Bay Area with an average of 153,525 operations per year since 2014. Airport Operations for the calendar year of 2023 decreased 8% compared to the calendar year 2022. An operation is defined as either a takeoff or a landing and a touch-and-go procedure will account for two operations.

**Table 1. Airport Operations for Palo Alto Airport**

Year	Air Taxi	Military	Total	Year	Air Taxi	Military	Total
2004	619	12	199453	2014	1518	22	179900
2005	2397	28	184821	2015	1082	118	172132
2006	1932	17	176570	2016	708	52	153238
2007	1440	318	181883	2017	872	146	148769
2008	1697	280	174332	2018	760	133	146181
2009	1650	301	155556	2019	920	63	150266
2010	2077	6	158217	2020	620	45	112712
2011	1572	8	170389	2021	566	23	158568
2012	1700	16	176564	2022	636	37	163620
2013	1628	14	172653	2023	763	21	149859
AVG	1671.2	100	175043.8	AVG	844.5	66	153524.5

During the 2023 Calendar year, the Airport logged 256 total noise complaints from 23 households. **Table 2** shows the number of complaints by quarter and includes the totals from 2022.

**Table 2. Complaints Received**

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total 2023	Total 2022
Complaints	13	213	20	10	256	383
Households	3	9	7	7	23	33

**Table 3** sorts the complaints logged into three sections. The first one is PAO which includes all complaints that involve aircraft that performed an operation at the Airport. The next section is General which includes complaints that did not include a specific aircraft or incident of noise. These complaints may or may not involve aircraft from PAO. The last section is Non-PAO, which include aircraft that are not based or did not operate at the Airport. These flights may include California Highway Patrol, Coast Guard, Air Taxis, Pipe

Surveys, Stanford Life Flight, Angel Flights, and or banner towing operations. Also included in Table 3 are the totals for 2022.

**Table 3. Aircraft Association**

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total 2023	Total 2022
PAO	4	211	16	5	236	337
General	0	0	0	4	4	14
Non-PAO	9	2	4	1	16	32

**Table 4** below provides a detailed breakdown of the 256 complaints by City. Most complaints came from the City of Palo Alto, with 227 complaints logged from 8 household. One household in the City of Palo Alto provided 195 complaints as can be seen in Attachment C.

**Table 4. PAO Noise Complaints by City**

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Total 2023		Total 2022	
City	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H
Cupertino							1	1	1	1	0	0
East Palo Alto			1	1	2	2	1	1	4	4	6	5
Los Altos			4	1					4	1	1	1
Menlo Park	9	1	3	1					12	2	5	4
Mountain View							1	1	1	1	0	0
Newark							1	1	1	1	1	1
Palo Alto	3	1	200	2	18	5	6	3	227	8	347	13
Pescadero											19	5
Pleasanton			2	1					2	1	1	1
Portola Valley	1	1							1	1	0	0
San Ramon											1	1
Santa Cruz											1	1
Sunnyvale			1	1					1	1	0	0
Unknown			1	1					1	1	1	1
Woodside			1	1					1	1	0	0
Total	13	3	213	9	20	7	10	7	256	23	383	33

**Table 5** below shows the general type of aircraft identified as causing noise complaints at the Airport. There are 2 types of engines for aircraft utilizing PAO. The first is reciprocating which is similar to an automobile engine, and the second is turboprop which is a turbine engine with a propeller that produces thrust. Aircraft are further differentiated by “multi” and “single” which denotes the number of engines for the aircraft. As Table 5, shows single reciprocating aircraft produced the largest portion of noise complaints. This class of aircraft represents most of the fleet at PAO and usually consists of Cessna, Piper and Cirrus aircraft.



**Table 5. Aircraft Type**

	Helicopter	Multi-Reciprocating	Multi-Turboprop	Single-Reciprocating	Single-Turboprop	Unknown	Drone
2023 Complaints	1	3	4	127	7	101	9
2022 Complaints	15	10	10	241	9	98	0

**Table 6** below shows the number of violations of the established noise abatement procedures. Airport staff makes every effort to talk to all pilots that violate these procedures, but it is difficult to talk to all transient pilots about noise abatement procedures. It is not the role of the FAA Air Traffic Control Tower to advise pilots of the noise abatement procedures, however, the City has developed a working relationship with the Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) and Air Controllers do advise pilots of the noise abatement procedures when they have the ability to do so.

**Table 6. Observed Violations of Noise Abatement Procedures**

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total
Tenant	1	15	8	3	27
Transient	0	15	1	0	16
Unknown	0	0	1	0	1
Total	1	30	10	3	44
Complaints	13	213	20	10	256
Operations	29,707	43,115	42,507	34,530	149,859
% Compliance	99.997%	99.930%	99.976%	99.991%	99.971%

## **Attachment A**

### **PAO Noise Contour Map**

Following is a noise contour map for PAO, adopted by the Santa Clara County Airport Land Use Commission (SCC ALUC) in their 2008 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, reflecting the forecasted noise contours for Palo Alto Airport in 2022.

SCC ALUC used the Integrated Noise Model which considers airport altitude, mean temperature, runway configuration, aircraft flight track definition, aircraft departure and approach profiles, aircraft traffic volume and fleet mix, and flight track utilization by aircraft types. All data is entered into the CNEL formula to prepare the noise contours for Palo Alto Airport.

The 65 decibel (db) noise level of the Airport extends beyond the airport boundaries, but is only over Palo Alto Golf Course, Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve, and the salt marshes in San Mateo County.

Refer to [https://stgenpln.blob.core.windows.net/document/ALUC\\_PAO\\_CLUP.pdf](https://stgenpln.blob.core.windows.net/document/ALUC_PAO_CLUP.pdf), for a more detailed description of how the SCC ALUC prepared this map.

## Palo Alto Airport



0 1,000 2,000 4,000 Feet

This map created by Santa Clara County Planning Office. The GIS data was compiled from various sources. While deemed reliable, the Planning Office assumes no liability.



## **Attachment B**

### **PAO Pilot Handout**

Santa Clara County created a Pilot Handout for Palo Alto Airport that described the noise abatement procedures. When the City of Palo Alto assumed control of the Airport, the existing noise abatement procedures were adopted, with one exception, “pilots must maintain 1,500 feet or above across Highway 101” was replaced with “Aircraft are asked to climb to and maintain at least 1,500 feet before crossing Highway 101.” The change is consistent with the voluntary nature of noise abatement procedures as Airports are Federally prohibited from instructing pilots how to fly.

**SAFETY FIRST**

**BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR – FLY SAFELY AND QUIETLY**

**Not to be used  
for navigation**

Left Dumbarton  
Departure

No left turns before the  
Dumbarton Auto Bridge

Left Downwind  
Departure

Right 270/220  
Departure

Bayside Pattern – 800 ft

Peninsula Side Pattern – 1000 ft

Left 270  
Departure

Be Aware PAO Airspace lies  
under SFO Class B Airspace  
and SJC Class C Airspace

### PAO Noise Abatement Procedures

Please fly neighborly and be aware of the surrounding communities. There are noise sensitive areas to the West and South of the Airport. Aircraft are asked to climb to and maintain at least 1500 feet before crossing Hwy 101.

Fly over the bay whenever possible.

Please use reduced power settings whenever safely possible to reduce noise impacts. Even a reduction in 200 RPM can significantly reduce noise.

### Preferred Noise Abatement Procedures

#### Runway 31

##### Left Dumbarton Departure

When departing RWY 31 turn right 10° on takeoff and climb over the bay. Fly to the Dumbarton Auto Bridge before making a left turn to fly over the peninsula or to the South. Cross Highway 101 at or above 1500 feet.

##### Right 270°/220° Departure

After take off climb over the bay while making a 220° turn to the South or 270° turn to the West. Cross Hwy 101 at or above 1500 feet.

- Clearly make request to PAO ATCT the desire to make a 220° or 270 turn. ATCT will deny all right downwind departures.

#### Runway 13

##### Left 270° Departure

After takeoff turn left and climb over the bay while making a 270° turn to the West. Cross over Highway 101 at or above 1500 feet.

#### PAO General Information

Bayside Pattern Altitude – 800 feet

Peninsula Side Pattern Altitude – 1000 feet

ATCT Hours of Operation – 0700 – 2100 hrs

ACT / CTA Frequency – 118.600

ATC Ground Frequency – 125.000

ATIS Frequency – 135.275

Fuel Frequencies – 122.85 or 122.95

Airport Operations Phone Number – (650) 690-5992

#### Caution

The Palo Alto Baylands preserve is located immediately to the north-east of the airport. Watch for birds on or near the airport.

**ATCT DIRECTION SUPERSEDES NOISE ABATEMENT**



## Attachment C

### Map of Palo Alto Households

