

Noise in Our Community

Noise and Your Health

Noise may harm more than our ears - Loud noise can be a serious environmental and health hazard; it has been shown to impact physiological changes in sleep, blood pressure and digestion. Loud noise is a leading quality of life issue in communities across the nation.

Noise and sleep - Noise is one of the most common sleep disturbances, and when sleep disruption becomes chronic, the risk of adverse health effects is increased. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends a day-night indoor average sound level of 45 decibels, and a night-time average level of 35 decibels to protect against sleep disturbance. A noisy refrigerator may generate 50 decibels.

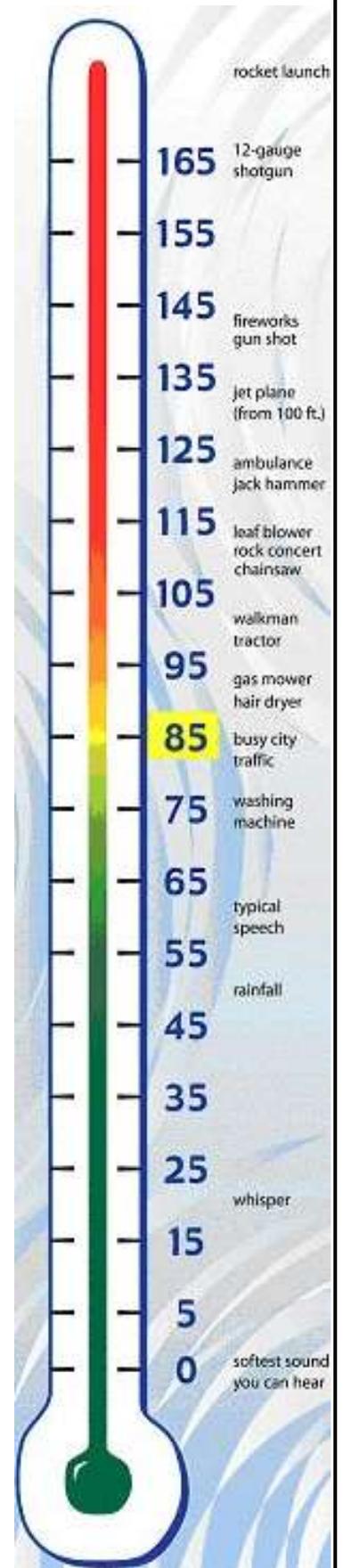
Governing Noise

Noise disturbances are defined and controlled by a City Ordinance (Chapter 138) and County law. The City of College Park's noise ordinance states that:

"Unless it is for the purpose of necessary property maintenance during the day, it shall be unlawful... to generate loud or raucous sound on said property, or to permit any loud or raucous sound to be made or generated on said property, so as to cause unreasonable annoyance or disturbance to others living or located nearby".

The City noise ordinance applies 24-hours; it is violated when the noise level exceeds 65 decibels between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. (day), 55 decibels between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. (night), **OR** when two or more residents are disturbed by the noise and submit a written complaint to the Noise Control Board which has held a hearing to determine whether a violation occurred. Violations of the City ordinance as indicated in Chapter 110-2 are punishable by a fine of \$500 for a first offense and \$1,000 for the second offense within a six-month period. The Decibel (dBA) Meter, obtained from www.dangerousdecibels.org, at the right shows examples of things that make noise and measurements in decibels. *Measurements are taken at the property line.*

Prince George's County restricts noise in residential areas audible more than 50 feet from its source. In early 2012, changes to the County Code (Section 19-122) became effective removing time limits and increasing fines. Violations are subject to a \$500.00 fine for a first offense and \$1,000.00 (Section 19-124) for subsequent offenses or imprisonment for up to 30 days.



What You Can Do About Noise

- ✓ **Call the Code Enforcement/Noise Hotline at 240-487-3588** day or night if you have a concern. Code enforcement officer schedules are adjusted during peak violation times on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 6:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. in the late spring and early fall to respond to complaints. A code enforcement officer will attempt to take a sound level reading, and if warranted, issue a municipal infraction citation which will be sent to the household by mail and posted on the property. City contract police officers will also respond with code enforcement officers, and will shut down a party or loud event which exceeds the City Code limits.
- ✓ **Call the Prince George's County Police (9-1-1 for urgent/emergency assistance or 301-352-1200 for non-emergency);** this is often best for prompt action. The Public Safety Communications dispatcher will send an available police officer to the scene, who will order noise-makers to comply with the law if a violation is determined
- ✓ **Call the UM Police (301-405-3555)** - University of Maryland Police have concurrent jurisdiction in the Old Town and Lord Calvert Manor (Knox Box) communities. They will respond to disturbances occurring at University owned off-campus student housing (fraternities, etc.) within their jurisdiction.
- ✓ If two or more City residents file a written complaint for a specific noise disturbance, the Noise Control Board will hold a hearing. Complaints should be sent to the College Park Noise Control Board at 4500 Knox Road within 15 days of the event.

Hints for effective action

- ✓ **Get to know your neighbors** - Problems can often be solved by asking neighbors to turn down the volume or to take the party inside. Neighbors with good relationships are more likely to compromise when problems arise. However, if this approach fails, you may need to take further action for egregious violations.
- ✓ **Call code enforcement** - Call **240-487-3588** day or night to reach the Code Enforcement hotline. Be sure to leave detailed information on the location and time of the incident. You should also provide your name and telephone number if you would like a return call from staff.
- ✓ **Call both police and code enforcement** - It may seem like one call too many, but calling both numbers will get the attention and assistance of both City and County enforcement efforts.
- ✓ **Record detailed information** - Your complaint will be more effective if you can accurately identify where the noise is coming from, including the address as well as the date, time, and nature of the noise.
- ✓ **Request a police visit** - When calling the police, you may ask that the officer stop by your home so that you know when they arrive and can ask what actions were taken. Or you may ask that they not contact you if you do not want neighbors to know you called the police.
- ✓ **Get support of your neighbors** - When more than one person calls to report a particular disturbance, the police and the City will know the complaint is serious and a higher priority over other kinds of complaints.

A noise pamphlet was initially prepared in June 2003 for College Park residents by the Committee of a Better Environment (CBE). This revision was prepared by City Staff in February 2012. For information about CBE activities, please visit www.collegeparkmd.gov or contact the City's Planning Department at 240-487-3538. For Code Enforcement information call 240-487-3570