

This Fact sheet was prepared for King County Council District 3 and is intended for general information. Its content is based on the code provisions adopted in Ordinance 18000 and reflects County law as of July 2, 2015. The content of this Fact sheet is not intended, and should not be taken, as legal advice on any particular set of facts or circumstances and should not be considered as a substitute for legal advice on specific legal problems.

## Unincorporated King County Noise Code Fact Sheet

Effective July 2, unincorporated King County residents have a new, improved noise code.<sup>1</sup> If you're experiencing loud and raucous **neighborhood noise**, you should call the King County Sheriff's Office non-emergency line at **206-296-3311**. For **construction** noise, call the Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (DPER) at **206-296-6680**. For unreasonable **animal** noise, call the Pet Information Line at **206-296-PETS (7387)**.

### Neighborhood Noise

Sheriff 206-296-3311

**Noise in general, with some exceptions,<sup>2</sup> must abide by these decibel limits:**

| Sound Source District | Rural    | Receiving Property District |            |            |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
|                       |          | Residential                 | Commercial | Industrial |
| Rural                 | 49 dB(A) | 52 dB(A)                    | 55 dB(A)   | 57 dB(A)   |
| Residential           | 52 dB(A) | 55 dB(A)                    | 57 dB(A)   | 60 dB(A)   |
| Commercial            | 55 dB(A) | 57 dB(A)                    | 60 dB(A)   | 65 dB(A)   |
| Industrial            | 57 dB(A) | 60 dB(A)                    | 65 dB(A)   | 70 dB(A)   |

**Night-time is quieter:** Between 10pm and 7am weekdays, and between 10pm and 9am weekends, these decibel limits are 10 decibels less for noises heard in rural or residential districts.

**In addition, noise must not be a public nuisance noise that unreasonably disturbs a community or neighborhood.**

**Noise must also not be a public disturbance noise that unreasonably disturbs or interferes with the peace, comfort or repose of a person or persons.** Time of day can be a factor in determining reasonableness. Examples include:

- Frequent, repetitive or continuous sounds from sources such as:
  - a horn or siren on a car;
  - repair of, operating or testing a vehicle or watercraft;
  - a loud and raucous band session or party on land or water
  - amplified rhythmic bass music that is plainly audible or can be felt at 50 feet or more over land or 300 feet or more over water
- Using an amplifier for commercial advertising unless it is the vendor's sole method of selling;
- Loud and raucous sound within 1,000 feet of a school, hospital or nursing home;
- Outdoor sound that interferes with normal conversation 50 feet away.

<sup>1</sup> The updated noise code (primarily Title 12) went into effect on July 2, 2015. Ordinance 18000, which amended the noise code, can be found at <http://mkcclegisearch.kingcounty.gov/> by typing "18000" in the search box. The King County Code update of the noise code will be posted to the Internet by August 10, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Pure tones, impulsive sounds, vehicles, watercraft, and construction carry different requirements; see also Variances and Exemptions.

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**Vehicles:** King County defers to state law for vehicle decibel limits on public highways (Table I of WAC 173-62-030, <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-62-030>). However, vehicles operated off of public highways that make noise in rural or residential districts must follow the decibel table shown above. Mufflers and other sound-dissipating devices are not allowed to be removed or rendered inoperative except for repair. Non-emergency squealing or screeching of tires is unlawful.

**Watercraft:** Within 50 feet of shoreline or property, the decibel limit for watercraft is 74 decibels, but for rural or residential districts the limit from 10pm to 7am is 64 decibels.

### **Construction Noise** **Permitting Dept (DPER) 206-296-6680**

Construction noise is regulated by time of day instead of decibel level. Normal and usual sounds created by construction are allowed during the following times:

- Heavy equipment: 7am to 7pm weekdays, 9am to 7pm weekends
- Impact equipment (pile drivers, etc.) – 8am to 5pm weekdays, 9am to 5pm weekends
- All other construction activities – 7am to 10pm weekdays, 9am to 8pm weekends

### **Animal Noise** **Animal Services 206-296-PETS (7387)**

Animal noise is governed by Title 11. Any animal that makes "oral noises to an unreasonable degree, in such a manner as to disturb a person or neighborhood" is in violation of the animal code (K.C.C. 11.04.230).

### **Variations**

A variance from the noise standards can be granted by the Director of DPER as part of a DPER permitted activity. Please see K.C.C. 16.82.105.B. for the review process for such a request.

For any other activity, temporary variances can be granted by DPER for up to 14 days if the director determines that the request doesn't significantly affect a substantial number of people or endanger public health or safety. Such a request must be submitted to the Director of DPER at least 45 days in advance of the activity for simple reviews (\$200 fee) and 90 days in advance for more complex reviews (\$395 to \$790). Please inquire with DPER for which category your request would fall under.

### **Exemptions**

Some noises are exempt from the noise code all the time, and some are exempt for certain times of day. Some are pre-empted by other regulations (e.g., aircraft flight operations); others are related to safety (fire alarms, etc.). The Director of DPER can exempt noise from emergency work necessary for the health, safety or welfare of the community. Please refer to Ordinance 18000 for the entire list of exemptions.

### **Citations and Appeals**

If you are cited for a noise infraction, the fines go up for each violation within a 12 month period. Mediation is encouraged. In fact, for your first violation within a 12-month period, if you make a good faith attempt to mediate with the complaining party, the court has the option to dismiss your case. Citations for noise infractions and variance decisions are appealable. Appeals for actions by DPER go to the county Hearing Examiner. Appeals for Sheriff actions go to the District Court.