

Noisy neighbours?

What you
need to know
about noise:
tips and
advice



ACT
Government

**Access
Canberra.**

Residential noise complaints

Often we are unaware of how noise coming from our home impacts those around us.

Sometimes you can't hear what your neighbours can. It's important to remember that often our noise is not our neighbour's choice but there are some simple steps you can take to minimise noise.

In the ACT, the most common noise complaints are about:

- loud music and parties
- air conditioners and pool pumps
- garden maintenance including leaf blowers
- building renovations and power tools.

The *Environment Protection Act 1997* sets out the noise levels permitted in residential areas for day and night. Penalties apply if the noise exceeds acceptable limits.

This guide sets out the noise limits and lets you know how noisy you can be when doing certain activities. It also provides tips on minimising noise and who to contact about noise issues.

Noisy neighbours and parties

Parties and events

Letting us know if you are having a party/event will help us manage any noise complaints we may receive. When you complete the details of your party/event at act.gov.au/noise, you can also print a self-populating letter to let your neighbours know you will be holding a party/event.

Remember to drop off the letter ten days before your party/event because most people appreciate advance notice so they can make other arrangements if necessary.

In the ACT, permitted noise levels drop after 10pm so it's a good time to move the music and guests inside at this time.

If you are playing music you can minimise noise by ensuring the speakers are not facing towards a neighbour and remember to turn the volume of the bass down as this often bothers neighbours.

More tips are available at act.gov.au/noise



AC

Air conditioners

Did you know noise from air conditioners and evaporative coolers can disturb your neighbours, disrupt their sleep and interfere with their normal daily activities?

It's a good idea to discuss noise concerns with neighbours before installing equipment that emits noise.

The location of an air conditioner is the most important factor in ensuring noise is not going to be intrusive.

Placing the unit at the side of your house close to a neighbour's house is likely to create excessive noise because the noise is trapped and reflected between the walls and eaves of the two houses.

A fence has limited value in reducing noise in this situation, unless it is solid and is as high as the eaves of the houses.

Placing the air conditioner on the rear wall facing the backyard, or on a front or side wall facing the street, reduces the noise reaching neighbours. If the noise is found to be excessive, it is a simple task to construct a barrier to shield the neighbouring property from the noise.

It is important to select an appropriately sized air conditioner which will comply with the noise standard.

Seek advice from the installer on whether the unit will comply with noise standards in the proposed location or refer to the Australian Institute of Refrigeration, Air Conditioning and Heating (AIRAC) guide to help you decide which cooling system may best meet your needs and the relevant noise standards.

Visit **airah.org.au**

When choosing an air conditioner, check the sound power level on the unit label or in the production specifications.

The smaller the number of dB(A) on the label, the quieter the air conditioner. Comparing levels on units of the same capacity allows you to choose a quieter unit.

Further information is available at **act.gov.au/noise**

Tips for managing noise in residential areas

Did you know most noise concerns in residential areas can be resolved with a simple conversation?

Here are some tips to get the conversation started:

1. **Think ahead** of time about what you want to say
2. **Choose a time** to chat that is convenient
3. **Explain calmly** how the noise is affecting you
4. **Listen** to your neighbour's side of the story and acknowledge what they say
5. Suggest a **solution** – do you want them to lower the noise or change the time they make the noise
6. Be willing to **compromise**
7. **Keep a record** of your conversation/s while it is still fresh in your mind – this may be useful in the future
8. **Consider dispute coaching or mediation** by the Conflict Resolution Service (6190 7100). This service is free and confidential for neighbourhood disputes.

How noise is managed in the ACT

Most noise concerns are short-term and can usually be resolved through discussion between whoever is causing the noise and the affected parties.

1. It is important you inform yourself on your rights and responsibilities regarding noise. Visit act.gov.au/noise for further information.
2. Discuss your noise concern with the person causing the noise. Many noise concerns can be resolved with a simple conversation. For tips on how to start the conversation visit act.gov.au/noise or if you need further help contact the Conflict Resolution Service on 6190 7100 or email mediation@crs.org.au
3. If you are unable to resolve your noise concern, you can lodge a complaint via act.gov.au/fixmystreet. Please note a complaint will only be considered if it is made by the person affected by the noise.
4. In the first instance a letter will be sent to the person making them aware of the noise from their house.
5. If the noise continues to be an issue, the matter will be investigated. Should the noise be found to be above the noise standards a warning letter, a fine or an Environment Protection Order (EPO) may be issued. Breach of an EPO is a serious offence and could lead to prosecution in court.

Noise standards

The *Environment Protection Act 1997* (the Act) and the *Environment Protection Regulation 2005* (the Regulation) aim to protect people from excessive noise.

The ACT noise limits or standards are detailed in Schedule 2 of the Regulation. The noise standards permit higher noise levels in industrial areas and much lower levels in residential areas.

Noise levels are measured at the boundary of the property emitting the noise. If the noise is coming from a unit (such as a flat or a townhouse) located within a multi-unit complex, the noise standard is 5 dB(A) lower.

Any noise generated within the common use areas of such complexes is a matter for the body corporate to deal with.

If a residence borders non-residential land (eg a residential block adjacent to local shops), or if it is located on non-residential land, different standards may apply.

Further information is available from the EPA by calling **13 22 81** or email **environment.protection@act.gov.au**.

The following noise standards must not be exceeded in residential areas.



Table 1: Noise standards in residential areas

Location	7am-10pm Monday to Saturday	10pm-7am Monday to Saturday
	8am-10pm Sunday and Public Holidays	10pm-8am Sunday and Public Holidays
Civic centre and other major town centres (Belconnen, Gungahlin, Woden and Tuggeranong)	60 dB(A)	50 dB(A)
Group centres such as Dickson and Kingston	55 dB(A)	45 dB(A)
Smaller local centres such as Griffith and Lyneham	50 dB(A)	35 dB(A)
Residential Zones	45 dB(A)	35 dB(A)

Some activities conducted in residential areas, that are acceptable to the community, have higher noise standards but must comply with the conditions in the table below.

Table 2: Noise standards for specific activities in residential areas

Activity	Location
Garden maintenance* including lawnmowers and garden equipment	7am-8pm Monday to Saturday 8am-8pm Sunday and Public Holidays
Maintenance or repair work* including the use of power tools, etc	7am-8pm Monday to Saturday 8am-8pm Sunday and Public Holidays Noise exceeding the standard may only be emitted for up to 40 hours in any 8 week period.
New Year's Eve parties	6 pm 31 December - 12.30pm 1 January Any noise emitted must not exceed 60 dB(A)
Warming up of motor vehicle engines	May exceed the standard for no longer than 5 minutes except if the vehicle's operating manual specifies a longer period.



Activity	Location
Building work in residential areas	<p>Completed in less than 2 weeks</p> <p>7am-8pm Monday to Saturday 8am-8pm Sunday and Public Holidays</p> <p>Taking more than 2 weeks to complete</p> <p>7am-6pm Monday to Saturday</p> <p>No noise exceeding the standard permitted on Sundays and Public Holidays</p>
Building work in industrial, city and town centre areas**	6am-8pm Monday to Sunday and Public Holidays
Garbage collection in residential areas	7am-10pm
Commercial garbage collection in**	
Industrial areas	Anytime
City and Town Centres	2am-10pm
Manuka and Kingston Group Centres	5am-10pm
Other Group Centres	6am-10pm
Building intruder alarm	May exceed the standard for no longer than 10 minutes if installed before 1 December 1997 or no longer than five minutes if installed after December 1997
Motor vehicle intruder alarm	May exceed the standard for no longer than 90 seconds for a vehicle manufactured before 1 September 1997 or no longer than 45 seconds if manufactured on or after 1 September 1997.

*Any equipment must be maintained and operated according to the manufacturer's specification.

**If a residence borders non residential land or if it is located on non-residential land, different noise standards may apply for certain activities.



Handy contacts

Put these up on your fridge or in a handy place!

There are many different types of noise. Below is a list of handy contacts depending on the noise enquiry you have.

- > **Aircraft noise** (including hot air balloons) – Air Services Australia **1800 802 584**
- > **Animals (domestic)** such as barking dogs or roosters – Domestic Animal Services will investigate the matter upon receipt of a completed 14 day ‘bark diary’. Visit **tccs.act.gov.au** and search ‘animal nuisance’.
- > **Cars (traffic)** such as noise generated from cars travelling past property – Access Canberra via **act.gov.au/fixmystreet**
- > **Cars/trucks (mechanical)** such as a noisy motor or squeaky fan belt. If you believe the vehicle may be defective you can complete a defective vehicle report. Visit **act.gov.au/accessCBR** and search ‘motor vehicle inspections’.
- > **Drones** – Air Services Australia – **1800 802 584** or via online form at **https://complaints.bksv.com/asa**
- > **Residential noise** such as air conditioners – talk to your neighbour first then visit **act.gov.au/noise**
- > **All other noise** – Access Canberra via **act.gov.au/fixmystreet**
- > **Further information** is available from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) by calling **13 22 81** or email **environment.protection@act.gov.au**

Useful resources

Conflict Resolution Service: **crs.org.au**
email: **mediation@crs.org.au**
phone: **02 6190 7100**

Easier. Simpler. Here to Help.

act.gov.au/accessCBR | 13 22 81