



City of Alexandria, VA

Noise Control

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What is Noise Control?

The objective of Noise Control is to prevent any noise that annoys or disturbs the comfort, health, welfare, environment, peace, or safety of any person in the City of Alexandria.

The most common sources of noise include, but are not limited to:

- Construction activities
- Aircraft
- Loud neighbors
- Traffic
- Leaf blowers and other lawn equipment
- Loud music, "boom cars"
- Sirens, car alarms, horn honking
- Barking dogs and other animals

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What is the City Doing?

The Environmental Noise Protection Program in the City of Alexandria consists of the following elements:

- Incorporating U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recommended guidelines in the construction of new residential and commercial developments to meet indoor noise standards.
- The operation of a noise complaint telephone number to receive complaints from citizens and to address those concerns in a timely manner.
- Assessing the compliance and non-compliance of noise sources according to City's Noise Code and taking enforcement action where warranted.

The Office of Environmental Quality (OEQ) is responsible for enforcing Noise Control in the City of Alexandria. The Noise Control Code can be found in [Section 11-5](#) in the Alexandria City Code. You may download a PDF copy of the Noise Code, or you may obtain a hard copy of the Noise Code by calling 703-746-4065 or by visiting the Office of Environmental Quality, Room 3900, City Hall @ 301 King Street.

[Sec. 11-5-12](#) of the Code describes the civic and criminal penalties that may be imposed by OEQ for noise violations. **Civil** penalties range from \$50 to \$500, depending on the severity of the offense. **Criminal** penalties occur when any person knowingly refuses to comply with any written order to cease or abate any violation of the Noise Code. The violator will be charged with a class 2 misdemeanor by the Alexandria General District Court.

Please see [Sec. 11-5-12](#) of the Code for more details on civic and criminal penalties. **OEQ makes every effort to work with individuals to resolve noise issues before resorting to punitive measures.**

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How to Lodge a Complaint

The Department of Transportation and Environmental Services, through its Office of Environmental Quality (OEQ) administers and enforces the provisions of the Noise Code. The [Police Department](#), [Code Enforcement Bureau](#), and [Construction & Inspection Division](#) are also responsible for enforcing the Noise Code.

OEQ answers complaints during regular business hours. To lodge a complaint with OEQ, please call 703-746-4065 or complete the [on-line problem reporting form](#).

The Code Enforcement Bureau enforces the construction, construction devices and power equipment provisions of the Noise Code. To lodge a complaint, please call 703-746-4200.

The Police Department has a non-emergency phone number for complaints after regular business hours (after 5 pm on weekdays, during weekends, and Holidays when City Hall is closed). To lodge a complaint, please call 703.838.4444.

When lodging a complaint, please remember to include: 1) a description of the noise your experiencing; 2) your contact information if you would like a return call; 3) the location of your complaint; 4) time, date, and duration of the complaint; and 5) any additional information that will assist the staff with resolving the issue.

Sec. 11-5-12 describes the civic and criminal penalties that may be imposed by DEQ for noise violations. DEQ makes every effort to work with individuals to resolve noise issues before resorting to punitive measures.

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What is Unlawful Noise?

Unlawful Noise is determined initially by testing the noise against ten different standards, as found in Section 11-5-3.

- Level of noise;
- Whether the nature of the noise is usual or unusual;
- Whether the origin of the noise is natural or unnatural;
- Proximity of noise to residential sleeping facilities;
- Nature and zoning of the area within which the noise emanates;
- Density of inhabitation of the area within which the noise emanates;
- Time of day or night the noise occurs;
- Duration of the noise;
- Whether the noise is recurrent, intermittent or constant; and
- Whether the noise is produced by a commercial or noncommercial entity.

The tests for Unlawful Noise are not limited to the ten standards listed above. DEQ must then determine if the noise is a violation of the Noise Code, and may impose civic or criminal penalties, as described in Sec. 11-5-12. **OEQ makes every effort to work with individuals to resolve noise issues before resorting to punitive measures.**

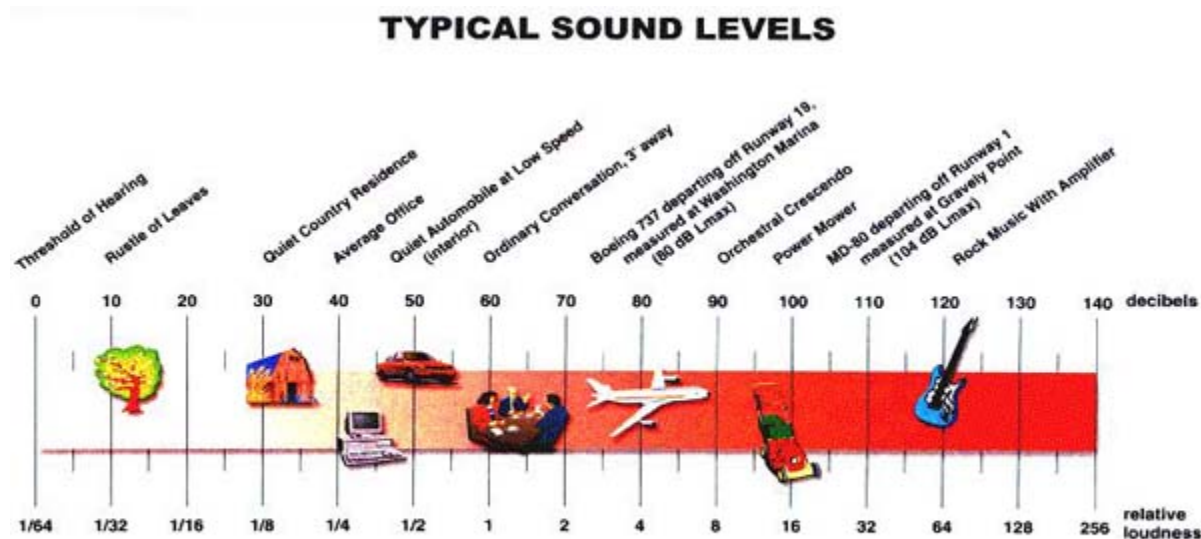
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Decibel Chart: How Loud Are You?

Unwanted sound is called noise. Sound is perceived when there is a variation of the static air pressure. Compared to the static air pressure, the variations that can be perceived by the ear are very small. The response of the ear is logarithmical rather than linear to the stimuli and therefore the acoustic parameters are expressed as a logarithmic ratio of the measured value to the reference value. This logarithmic ratio is

called decibel (dB).

Typical decibel levels associated with different noise sounds and their services are shown in the following image:



The **decibel (dB)** is a unit for describing sound pressure levels. A-weighted sound measurements (dBA) are filtered to reduce the effect of very low and very high frequencies, better representing human hearing. With A-weighting, sound monitoring equipment approximates the human ear's sensitivities to the different sounds of frequencies.

(Source: Washington Metropolitan Airport Authority)

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Construction Hours

The use of Construction Devices and Power Equipment (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)15) is permitted during the following hours:

- Monday - Friday: 7:00 am to 6:00 pm
- Saturday: 9:00 am to 6:00 pm
- Sunday: Prohibited

The use of Pile Drivers (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)19) is permitted during the following hours:

- Monday - Friday: 9:00 am to 6:00 pm
- Saturday: 10:00 am to 4:00 pm
- Sunday: Prohibited

All construction is prohibited on the following holidays (Sec. 11-5-5(a)(5)a):

- New Year's Day (the first day of January)
- Memorial Day (the last Monday in May)
- Independence Day (July 4)
- Labor Day (the first Monday in September)
- Thanksgiving Day (the fourth Thursday in November)
- Christmas Day (December 25)

The use of all Construction Equipment, including Pile Drivers, is regulated by permitted hours, not by decibel levels.

After Hours Construction Work

In most cases, construction activities must be permitted by the City prior to operation outside of the permitted hours. Applicants must fax in a completed permit application, which, upon approval, must be picked up at the OEQ office.

Permits are granted to applicants on a case-by-case basis, and applicants must demonstrate that operation during the permitted hours is not feasible. The application should also demonstrate how this noise allowance outside normal hours will benefit the City of Alexandria (e.g., mitigate traffic issues).

Section 11-5-7 of the City Noise Code describes the process required to apply for a noise variance. Please see Permits and Variances for more information.

Tips for Reducing Construction Activities Noise

The noise generated from construction sites is often characterized as being inherent to the process. Some of the noisiest devices utilized by workers are drills, saws, hammers, and generators. Despite popular belief, contractors can be successful at creating a quieter construction site by strategically identifying problematic noise sources and implementing measures such as the following:

- Install temporary barriers/enclosures around noisy activities or equipment.
- Consider implementing quieter process. For example, supplement pile driver activities with boring operations whenever possible.
- Retrofit older equipment with sound absorbing material or add new mufflers.
- Follow the manufacture's recommended maintenance schedule to ensure proper functionality of the equipment.
- Identify excessively noisy equipment and locate it as far away as possible from local residents.

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Lawn & Garden Noise

The use of Power Lawn and Garden Equipment (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)16), including lawn mowers, edgers, and leaf blowers, is permitted during the following hours:

- Monday - Friday: 7:00 am to 9:00 pm
- Saturday & Sunday: 9:00 am to 9:00 pm
- Holidays: 9:00 am to 9:00 pm

Tips for Reducing Lawn and Gardening Equipment Noise

Noise emanating from lawn and gardening equipment has become a source of increasing concern in the City of Alexandria. The most troublesome of these tools are the leaf blowers, trimmers, and lawn mowers. When operating this equipment, the following tips will help minimize disturbance to your neighbors.

- Try to operate equipment during the afternoon or early evening hours. If at all possible, avoid operating equipment on Sundays.
- Purchase electric powered equipment versus gasoline powered equipment. Most electric powered devices are considerably quieter than their gasoline powered counterparts.
- Follow the manufacture's recommended maintenance schedule to ensure proper functionality of the equipment.
- Substitute power equipment with hand tools, reel mowers, lawn sweepers, rakes, and hand clippers.

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Other Noises

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Vehicle Noises

- **Truck Delivery, Loading, Unloading, Opening Boxes** (Sec.11-5-4 (b)9): Loading and unloading is permitted after normal business hours, provided that the operation does not cause excessive noise. Excessive noise is defined by Sec. 11-5-3 "Tests for unlawful noise." Businesses that operate under special use permits may have additional restrictions placed on them during business hours.
- **Bus/Truck Idling Noise:** Vehicles may run their engines at idle for no longer than 10 minutes at any time according to State of Virginia Air Quality Regulations.
- **Trash Pickup Hours:** Trash Pickup Hours are set by Title 5, Chapter 1 of the City Code. From May 1 to September 30, waste haulers are not permitted to begin operating before 6:00am. From October 1 to April 30, waste haulers are not permitted to begin

operating before 7:00am. If City residents have a complaint about trash pickup noise, they are encouraged to call the Code Enforcement at 703-746-4200 and report the hauler name and license plate or truck identification number.

- **Train Noise** (Sec. 11-5-6-6, 8). The City of Alexandria cannot regulate train noise due to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) regulations. However, construction on railroad property is regulated by Sec. 11-5-4 (b)15: "Construction Devices and Power Equipment."
- **Aircraft Noise** (Sec. 11-5-6-5): Aircraft are exempt from the City Noise Code. However, Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport is one of the most noise-controlled airports in the United States. Under the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority's regulations, aircraft may be only operated after 9:59 p.m. and before 7:00 a.m. if the noise level for the aircraft type and model meets National Airport's strict noise standards, which are designed to minimize sleep interference. Complaints can be logged with the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority (MWAA) by calling 703-417- 8020. For more information, please visit the [MWAA Noise Abatement Program website](#).
- **Vacuum truck noise in parking lots**: There is no code reference for the use of vacuum trucks; however, if they produce excessive noise, then they are considered to be an "unreasonable" noise. These trucks can be classified as construction noise.
- **Truck Braking Noise**: The City of Alexandria has signs posted on major truck thoroughfares that instruct truck drivers not to use "Jake Brakes." A Jake Brake is a component of the engine system that allows trucks to slow down without wearing down the wheel brakes. When engaged, it rapidly decompresses the air pressure in the engine, emitting a loud noise.
- **Car Muffler Noise**: The Police Department should be contacted in regards to car muffler noises. Please call the non-emergency police phone number 703-838-4444.
- **Car Alarm Noise**: The Police Department should be contacted in regards to car alarm noises. Please call the non-emergency police phone number 703-838-4444.
- **Ice Cream Truck Noise** (Sec.11-5-4(b)1): OEQ mails guidance letters to mobile ice cream vendors annually in the spring. Vendors are not permitted to play music in excess of ten seconds; they must also limit the frequency of the music played to once per two minutes per City block.

Residential Noises

- **AC/Heat Pump Noise** (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)17): In residential areas, the noise code allows up to 55 decibels at the property line; in commercial areas, the noise code allows up to 60 decibels at the property line; in industrial areas, the noise code allows up to 70 decibels at the property line. The same restrictions apply for other noises generated within the property line, such as wind chimes or fans.
- **Speaker Noise** (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)2): The operation of any radio receiving set, musical instrument, phonograph, or any other sound reproducing device is prohibited between 11:00pm and 7:00am if the sound is plainly audible across property boundaries at a distance of 50 feet from the source of the noise.
- **TV/Stereo Noise** (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)2): The operation of any radio receiving set, musical instrument, phonograph, or any other sound reproducing device is prohibited between 11:00pm and 7:00am if the sound is plainly audible across property boundaries at a distance of 50 feet from the source of the noise.
- **Block Parties**: Block parties must obtain a noise variance permit from OEQ and contact Construction and Inspection Division for an Application to Close City Street permit.
- **Parties at Home**: No special permits are issued for private parties. All private parties must comply with the noise code.
- **Barking Dogs and other Animals** (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)5): Residents may call the Department of Animal Control to discuss techniques to train noisy pets, services to help animals and their companions, or register complaint against licensed or unlicensed pets. The Alexandria Department of Animal Control can be reached by calling 703-838-4774 or by visiting their [website](#).
- **Homeowner Construction Work** (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)10): Homeowners are exempt from the Construction Hours provision of the Noise Code. This exemption does not apply when work involves use of power equipment, nor does it apply when the homeowner is acting as a general contractor and/or working for commercial purpose. Homeowners may engage in construction operations at their residences during the following permitted hours:

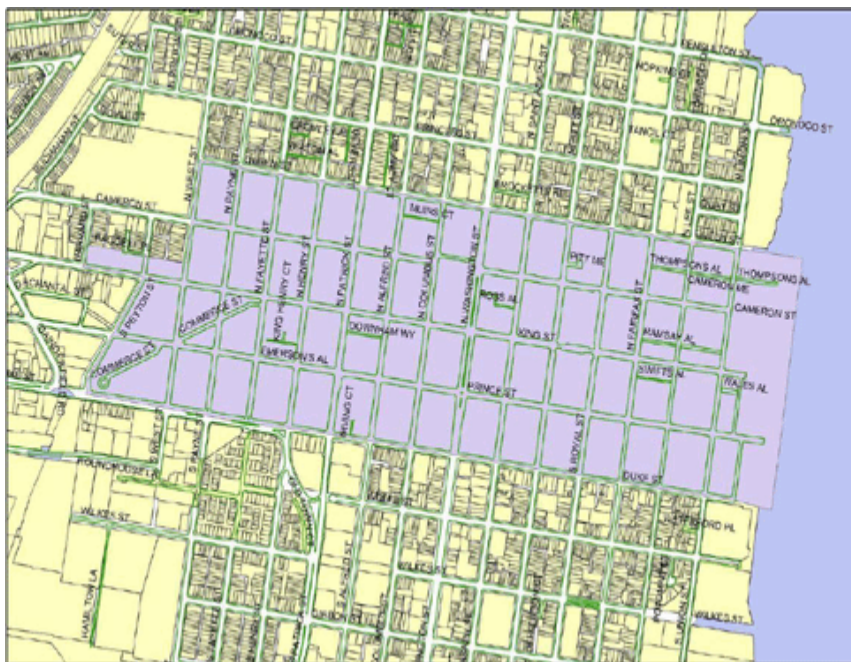
Monday – Friday: 7:00 am to 9:00 pm Saturday & Sunday: 9:00 am to 9:00 pm

Institutional Noise

- **Church Services**: Churches must comply with the noise code.
- **School Activity Noise**: Schools must comply with the noise code.
- **Noise in Public Places** (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)4): Loud noises are not permitted in public places between the hours 11:00pm and 7:00 am.
- **Central Business District Noise Regulations** (Sec. 11-5-4.1): The Central Business District (CBD) is located in Old Town, Alexandria and is bounded to the east by the Potomac River; to the south by Duke Street; to the west by S. Peyton Street and N. West Street; and to the north by Queen Street. Please see the map below for details. Due to the busy nature of the CBD, the hours

and volume of permitted noise is different than in the rest of the City.

- Between the hours 7:00am and 11:00pm, no sounds may be louder than 75 decibels, nor may they be sustained for greater than 60 seconds in any one hour period.
- Between the hours 11:00pm and 7:00am, no sounds may be louder than 65 decibels, nor may they be sustained for greater than 60 seconds in any one hour period



- **Advertising Noise** (Sec.11-5-4 (b)3): Audio commercial advertising is prohibited in the City of Alexandria, with the exception of political advertising.
- **Street Performer Noise** (Sec.11-5-4.1(c,d)): OEQ does not issue special permits for street performers in the right-of-way or the street. At no time may the streets or sidewalks be blocked without the proper right-of-way permits. The permitted noise levels are governed by Central Business District restrictions:
 - Between the hours 7:00am and 11:00pm, no sounds may be louder than 75 decibels at a distance of 10 feet from the place at which the sound is being generated or produced. The burden of proof shall be on the person responsible for such sound generation to prove otherwise.
 - Between the hours 11:00pm and 7:00am, no sounds may be louder than 65 decibels at a distance of 10 feet from the place at which the sound is being generated or produced. The burden of proof shall be on the person responsible for such sound generation to prove otherwise.

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Permits & Variances

The City Manager, or his duly authorized representative, may grant permits for relief of the City Noise Code on the basis of undue hardship from a noise level or time limits designated by the City.

In most cases, construction activities must be permitted by the City prior to operation outside of the permitted hours. Applicants must fax in a completed permit application, which upon approval, must be picked up at the Transportation and Environmental Services, Construction and Inspection office. The permit fee is \$50.00 per permit.

Permits are granted to applicants on a case-by-case basis, and applicants must demonstrate that operation during the permitted hours is not feasible. The application should also demonstrate how this noise allowance outside normal hours will benefit the City of Alexandria. [Download an Application for Noise Variance Permit: Construction.](#) For more information, please see Section 11-5-7 of the [City Noise Code](#).

If you are planning to use sound amplification equipment on City property (streets, parks, etc.), or if your event is on private property but is open to the public, you may be required to obtain a Noise Variance Permit to operate sound amplification equipment in the City. The permit fee is \$20.00 per permit. [Download an Application for Noise Variance Permit: Music and Sound Amplification.](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

General Noise Issues

What is a decibel? How loud are everyday events?

A decibel (dB) is a unit for describing sound pressure levels. A-Weighted sound measurements (dBA) are filtered to reduce the effect of very low and very high frequencies, better representing human hearing.

For example, ordinary conversation between two people standing three feet away is measured at 60 dBA lawn mower produces 100 dBA rock concert produces more than 120 dBA.

Please see the Decibel Chart for details.

Does the City of Alexandria have "quiet hours"?

Yes. It is unlawful for any person to make unreasonably loud or unnecessary noise in public places between the hours of 11:00pm and 7:00am. Please see Sec. 11-5-4 (b)4 in the Noise Code for details.

How does OEQ determine if a noise is unreasonably loud or unnecessary?

Unlawful Noise is initially determined by testing the noise against ten different standards, as found in Section 11-5-3.

- Level of noise;
- Whether the nature of the noise is usual or unusual;
- Whether the origin of the noise is natural or unnatural;
- Proximity of noise to residential sleeping facilities;
- Nature and zoning of the area within which the noise emanates;
- Density of inhabitation of the area within which the noise emanates;
- Time of day or night the noise occurs;
- Duration of the noise;
- Whether the noise is recurrent, intermittent or constant; and
- Whether the noise is produced by a commercial or noncommercial entity.

In addition, and when necessary, OEQ has the authority to exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis when a noise issue falls outside of the parameters of the ten standards listed above.

Construction Noise Issues

What are the regular hours in which Construction is allowed?

Construction is permitted during the following hours:

- Monday – Friday: 7:00am to 9:00pm
- Saturday: 9:00am to 6:00pm
- Sunday: Prohibited

The use of Pile Drivers (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)19) is permitted during the following hours:

- Monday – Friday: 9:00am to 6:00pm
- Saturday: 10:00am to 4:00pm
- Sunday: Prohibited

All construction is prohibited on the following holidays ([Sec. 11-5-5\(a\)\(5\)a.](#)):

- New Year's Day (the first day of January)
- Memorial Day (the last Monday in May)
- Independence Day (July 4)
- Labor Day (the first Monday in September)
- Thanksgiving Day (the fourth Thursday in November)

- Christmas Day (December 25)

Why are some construction operations allowed after the permitted hours?

In most cases, construction activities must be permitted by the City prior to operation outside of the permitted hours. Applicants must fax in a completed permit application, which, upon approval, must be picked up at the DEQ office. There is no fee for the permit. Permits are granted to applicants on a case-by-case basis, and applicants must demonstrate that operation during the permitted hours is not feasible. For more information, please see Section 11-5-7 of the City Noise Code.

Vehicle Noise Issues

There are car alarms in my neighborhood that go off at night. Who should I call?

Please call the Alexandria Police Department non-emergency number 703.838.4444.

What about loud car stereos, mufflers and motorcycles?

Please call the Alexandria Police Department non-emergency number 703.838.4444.

The garbage trucks wake me up in the morning. What are their permitted hours of activity?

Trash Pickup Hours are set by Item 5, Chapter 1 of the City Code. From May 1 to September 30, waste haulers are not permitted to be operating before 6:00am. From October 1 to April 30, waste haulers are not permitted to begin operating before 7:00am. If City residents have a complaint about trash pickup noise, they are encouraged to call the Code Enforcement at 703.746.4200 and report the hauler name and license plate or truck identification number.

The airplanes that fly over the City on their way to the airports are very loud. Is there a way for the City to alter their flight path?

Aircraft are exempt from the City Noise Code. However, the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport is one of the most stringently noise-controlled airports in the United States. Under the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority's regulations, aircraft may be only operated after 9:59 p.m. and before 7:00 a.m. if the noise level for the aircraft type and model meets National Airport's strict noise standards which are designed to minimize sleep interference. Complaints can be logged with the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority ([MWAA](#)) by calling 703-417-8020. For more information, please visit the MWAA Noise Abatement Program. Please see Sec. 11-5-6-5 for the full Code reference.

The trains are very loud. Do they have to blow their steam whistles?

The City of Alexandria cannot regulate train noise due to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) regulations (Sec. 11-5-6-6, 8). However, construction on railroad property is regulated by Sec. 11-5-4 (b)15: "Construction Devices and Power Equipment."

Residential Noise Issues

My neighbor is adding onto his residence. What are the permitted hours for homeowner construction?

In general, homeowners can conduct general construction work in the same permitted hours as those for power lawn and garden equipment. Homeowners are exempt from the Construction Hours provision of the Noise Code (Sec. 11-5-4 (b)10). This exemption does not apply when work involves use of power equipment, nor does it apply when the homeowner is acting as a general contractor and/or working for commercial purpose. Homeowners may engage in construction operations at their residences during the following permitted hours:

- Monday – Friday: 7:00am to 6:00pm
- Saturday & Sunday: 9:00am to 9:00pm
- Holidays:: 9:00am to 9:00pm

My neighbor plays loud music throughout the night. Can OEQ make them stop?

OEQ does not handle disputes between neighbors. The best solution would be to talk to your neighbor face to face and kindly ask them to respect your need for quiet. If you live in an apartment building, you might consider contacting the building management. If you are still unable to resolve the dispute, please call the Alexandria Police Department non-emergency phone number 703.838.4444.

I hear dogs barking at night. Is there anyone I can call to make them stop?

The proper authority to contact is the Department of Animal Control at 703-838-4774.

Our neighborhood wants to have a block party. What forms do we need to fill out to close the street down and play loud music?

You need an Application to Close City Street form and a Petition to Close City Street for a Neighborhood Block Party form. These forms must be submitted to the Construction Management and Inspection Division, located in Room 4130 in City Hall. Upon approval of the street closure permit, the applicant must apply for a Noise Variance Permit: Music and Sound Amplification. This permit must be submitted to the Office of Environmental Quality, located in Room 3900 in City Hall.

Institutional Noise Issues

I want to play musical advertisements outside of my place of business. Is this legal?

No. According to Sec.11-5-4 (b)3 of the City Noise Code, audio commercial advertising is prohibited within the City of Alexandria, with the possible exception of political advertising.

If audio commercial advertising is prohibited within the City of Alexandria, why are ice cream trucks allowed to play music?

Mobile ice cream vendors are not permitted to play music in excess of ten seconds; they must also limit the frequency of the music played to once per two minutes per City block. Please see Sec. 11-5-4(b)1 of the City Noise Code for more details.

Variances and Special Permits**I want to apply for a special permit or a variance to the Noise Code. How do I do this?**

Applicants must fax in a completed permit application, and then pick it up at Construction and Inspection office (Room 4130, City Hall) after it is approved. There is a fee for the application. Permits are granted to applicants on a case-by- case basis, and they must demonstrate that operation during the permitted hours is not feasible. For more information, please see Section 11-5-7 of the City Noise Code.

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Downloads & Forms

- [Noise Control Program Brochure](#)
- [Application for Noise Variance Permit: Construction](#)
- [Application for Noise Variance Permit: Music and Sound Amplification](#)

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<http://alexandriava.gov/tes/oeq/info/default.aspx?id=3840#what>