



Neighborhood Noise

Saturday morning, around dawn. After a long, hard week, you're enjoying one of the great pleasures in life... sleeping in. Suddenly, a neighbor fires up his chain saw. Across the back fence someone starts banging nails. Your cherished slumbers are rudely terminated. For a while you vainly cover your head with the pillow, and then, discouraged and cranky, you get up to face the day.

Chronic noise problems often cause irritation and frustration. They can also be hard to resolve. Laws and ordinances protect us from some noise disturbances. But many people are reluctant to call the authorities on their neighbors. And some bothersome noises may be within legal limits — a fact that probably won't make the noise less disturbing.

Going to the authorities over a noise problem can be tricky. Your neighbors may see your action as hostile. Neighborly relations can deteriorate. Even worse, your neighbors might retaliate, for example by calling Code Compliance over that shed you constructed near the property line. Neighborhood feuds can rapidly snowball in this manner.

Another possible problem with going to the authorities is that the remedy they provide may not help you. For example, if you are a night owl who gets up around 10 AM, the standard "quiet time" provisions may not be the quiet time you need. Or, you may succeed in reducing the number of pets your neighbor can keep, only to learn that the neighbor is getting rid of their quiet cat, while keeping their three barking dogs.

An alternative to going to the authorities is to negotiate directly with your neighbor. We know this may not be easy — and we don't recommend trying this right after you've been woken up on Saturday morning. Nor should you wait through months and months of mounting frustration. However, if you prepare yourself and carefully pick the time to speak with your neighbor there is a good possibility that you can negotiate a solution that addresses your specific situation. Sometimes merely raising awareness can be helpful.

The Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program is here to help you open up productive discussions. We can coach you through it. The mediation program has highly trained telephone conciliators and mediators who can help facilitate the discussions between you and your neighbor. Mediation can be particularly helpful when the issues are emotional or complex. Through this process the conciliators will help you and your neighbor articulate your concerns in a safe, neutral environment, and then find a solution that works for everyone. Our success rate is over 80%!

If you want to explore enforcement options, it's important to know who to call. Here in Bellevue, it depends on the type of noise involved. Bellevue Code Compliance handles noise from a stationary source, such as a generator, heat pump, or compressor (425-452-2074). The City of Bellevue Noise Control Ordinance, Chapter 9.18, has numerous exceptions and special cases. The entire ordinance can be viewed on-line at <https://development.bellevuewa.gov/>. King County Animal Control handles barking dogs (206-296-7387). The Bellevue Police Department handles all other noise problems, such as loud parties (425-452-6917).

Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program

425-452-4091

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<https://planning.bellevuewa.gov/community-development/conflict-assistance>

Adapted from an article written by Andrew Kidde in 2011.