

Advice on Noise from DIY and Building Activities



**North
Herts**
Council

Do it yourself (DIY) activities can be very noisy and cause a surprising number of neighbourly disputes and complaints to the Council. This leaflet gives some simple advice to avoid causing a nuisance to your neighbours.

Most people have jobs which need doing around the home, especially if they have just moved in or are redecorating. We understand that many people have jobs during the day and the only chance they have to do DIY is in the evenings and at weekends. However, this does not give anyone the right to annoy the neighbours at all hours of the day and night. We all have to be reasonable and live together.

Nuisance from DIY can be minimised by keeping noisy activities to reasonable hours and by thinking about what type of activity you are carrying out. We define noisy activities as:

- **Hand tools** - Use of hammers, saws etc.
- **Power tools** - Normal hand-held tools power tools (drills, saws, sanders, etc)
- **Plant and machinery** - People can now hire more professional plant and machinery such as pneumatic hammers, cement mixers, large power saws and planers, compressors and generators, etc. Use of more powerful equipment needs greater consideration.
- **Walls and floors** - Work on the wall or floor between properties can give surprising levels of noise. Work such as wallpaper stripping or wall preparation can sound very loud in your neighbour's home. Work on the floor, such as plumbing, rewiring and especially sanding, can be very loud upstairs or downstairs if you live in a flat.

Information to your neighbours

It often helps if you give your neighbours an indication of what work is being done and how long the works will last. They will then have a better idea of how much noise they have to put up with. Often, it is the uncertainty about the noise which worries people the most - they will be much happier if they know what is going on and have an end in sight.

Reasonable times for DIY

Noisier activities (as defined above) should be restricted to the following hours:

Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm

Saturday 9am to 5pm

Sunday or Bank Holidays 10am to 2pm

Of course, there is nothing to stop you doing the quieter activities (painting, decorating, etc) well past these hours, as long as you don't make noise which affects your neighbours.

Have you got the right equipment?

Sometimes, more powerful equipment will actually help solve the noise problem. There is nothing worse than using an old piece of equipment which cannot cope with the job. It makes far more noise and the job will often take much longer than if you had the correct piece of equipment.

Maintenance of equipment

Please make sure your equipment is well-maintained. Proper maintenance will reduce noise and increase your safety.

Music

It seems most people want the radio or stereo system on when they are doing DIY - it eases the burden! Please keep the volume down, especially in the evenings.

Doors and windows

If possible (allowing for dust and fumes), please try to keep doors and windows closed, as neighbours have just as much right for peace and quiet in their gardens.

Emergency working

Serious problems such as water leaks, electrical faults or missing roof tiles can mean people have to make noise at unsocial hours (outside our reasonable times). We accept this. However, we would ask you to think very carefully before you do so. Is there another way to solve the problem? For example, could the water not simply be turned off and the leak repaired the next day? If you have to work at unsocial hours, tell your neighbours why. Hopefully, they will understand.



Building works

We have to accept that building work is often noisy and many jobs cannot get done without some crashing and banging. However, with care, jobs such as small-scale construction, conversion, refurbishment, underpinning and even demolition can be carried out without causing too much annoyance to neighbours. The following advice explains how to avoid causing unacceptable noise whilst carrying out building works.

Building contractors are required by law to minimise disturbance from building works. Firstly, they should use the “best practicable means” to reduce noise. Secondly, they should keep noisy activities to reasonable hours. We define “noisy activities” as:

- **Hand tools** - Use of hammers, saws, etc. should be restricted to the hours given below.
- **Power tools** - Normal hand-held tools, power tools (drills, saws, sanders, etc.) can cause a lot of noise and their use should be restricted to the hours given below.
- **Plant** - This involves use of tools and equipment such as ‘Kango’ hammers, pneumatic hammers or vibrators, cement mixers, large power saws and planers, compressors, generators, etc. Use of this more powerful type of equipment needs greater consideration as it can be very noisy.
- **Erection and dismantling of scaffolding** - Can be a very noisy activity and should only be done within reasonable hours.
- **Deliveries of plant, equipment or materials** - This can be noisy, especially if it involves use of hoists from lorries or tipper lorries. Early morning deliveries cause particular complaints.
- **The party wall** - Work on the party wall between dwellings will give high levels of noise next door. This includes work such as hacking off plaster, chasing out, fixing wall plates, etc.

Informing your neighbours

It would be helpful if you could give neighbours advance warning of what work is to be done and how long the works will last. They will then have a better idea of how much noise they have to put up with. Often, it is the uncertainty about the noise which worries people the most - they will be much happier if they know what is going on and they have an end in sight. It is therefore excellent “public relations” if you can give your neighbours detailed information.

Minimising the noise

Professional building firms are businesses. They therefore have extra responsibilities imposed on them by law. The main one is to take the “best practicable means” to stop noise. For example, using a piece of noisy old equipment is not using the best practicable means. They should use the proper equipment which should be well maintained. Where possible, it should have silencers fitted or should have noise-containing hoods, etc.

What can Environmental Health do?

The Control of Pollution Act 1974 gives Environmental Health powers to control noise on construction sites; most normal building or demolition work will be covered by this legislation. Hours of work can be restricted, and conditions placed on what machinery can be used, how it should be used and where it should be located, etc.

Reasonable times for building works

The biggest step any building firm can take to avoid causing a noise problem is to be reasonable about their hours of work. People can reasonably expect rest from noise at the weekend and in the evening. This is especially important if young children are involved.

Noisy activities (as defined above) should therefore be restricted to the following hours, as well as ensuring that “best practicable means” are taken to minimise the noise at all times:

Monday to Friday- 8am to 6pm

Saturdays- 8am to 1pm

Sundays or Bank Holidays- no noisy working at all

It must be emphasised that action can still be taken on work within our recommended hours if the firm involved shows no consideration for neighbours by causing excessive noise. Too much noise during the daytime can still be against the law if they are above the levels permitted for construction work.

Of course, the hours shown are recommendations for restricting only the noisier building activities. There is nothing to stop a building firm from carrying out the quieter types of work (painting, decorating, etc) well past these hours, as long as they do not make noise which affects their neighbours.