

NOISE FROM SMALL SCALE BUILDING WORKS

Building works are often noisy. 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. This leaflet explains how to avoid causing unacceptable noise during building works. We have to accept that building work is often noisy and many jobs cannot get done without some crashing and banging. However, this does not give a building firm permission to annoy neighbours at all hours of the day and night. Building contractors are required by law to minimise disturbance from building works. First, they should use the “best practicable means” to reduce noise. Second, 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 complaint.
- **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. You 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 special powers to control noise on construction sites; much normal building or demolition work will be covered by these powers. Hours 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; we seek to provide peace and quiet at these times.

Providing that noisier activities (as defined above) are restricted to the following hours, and provided “best practicable means” are taken to minimise noise, then Environmental Health is unlikely to take action on a complaint. Our recommended hours are as follows:

- **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 be taken on work within our recommended hours if the firm involved shows not consideration for neighbours. Too much noise during the daytime can still be against the law.

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.

Noise Team

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