

# Managing noise from intruder alarms



Department of **Environment & Climate Change** NSW



## Managing noise from intruder alarms

This brochure is about ways in which you can avoid having a faulty intruder alarm, and what to do if a neighbour's alarm unduly disturbs you.

Intruder alarm systems are used in cars and buildings to protect against theft. Under the Protection of the Environment Operations (Noise Control) Regulation 2008 (the Regulation), alarms are only permitted to sound for a set time. The noise they make often disturbs neighbours and may result in owners being fined.



## How long can an alarm legally sound?

### Vehicles

It is an offence for an intruder alarm to sound for more than:

- 45 seconds for cars manufactured on or after 1 September 1997
- 90 seconds for older cars.

A defence is provided for the above conditions, but only for vehicles manufactured **before** 1 March 2009, if:

- a vehicle window or windscreen was broken or removed
- the motor vehicle was involved in an accident
- the motor vehicle was broken into or an attempt was made to break into it.

### Buildings

It is an offence for an intruder alarm to be heard in any neighbouring residence when it sounds for more than:

- 5 minutes if installed on or after 1 December 1997
- 10 minutes if installed before 1 December 1997.

No distinction is made between an alarm sounding because of a break-in or because it is faulty.

The owner or operator of a vehicle or the occupier of the building is responsible for the alarm system and could be fined if it sounds for longer than the allowed time.

It does not matter whether the alarm sounds continuously or intermittently for the purpose of measuring the sounding period.

## How do I prevent my alarm from becoming faulty?

You should ensure that the alarm is properly maintained. This is particularly relevant when the vehicle or building is left unattended for long periods.

Here are some things you can do:

- Purchase a good quality alarm.
- Ensure that detailed instructions are provided about operation and maintenance of the alarm system.
- Test the alarm soon after purchase to ensure that it complies with the time limits specified in Table 1.
- For car alarms, check the proper procedures for disarming and setting the alarm so that it does not sound unnecessarily.
- Follow the instructions about proper maintenance of the system.
- For a building intruder alarm installation, ask to see the security licence of the installer. The security industry register is at [www.police.nsw.gov.au/sir](http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/sir) or you can contact their staff on 1300 362 001.
- For a car alarm installation, check that the installer is experienced in installing your type of alarm system.
- Check that the system and installation are covered by warranty.

Be aware that the alarm system should be installed according to the Australian Standard for alarm installation. Building intruder alarms should be properly installed in accordance with AS2201.1–1998 *Intruder Alarm Systems – Systems Installed in Client’s Premises*. Vehicle intruder

alarms should be installed in accordance with AS/NZS 3749.2–1997 *Intruder Alarm Systems – Road Vehicles – Installation and Maintenance*.

Once the alarm system is properly installed, to keep it working properly:

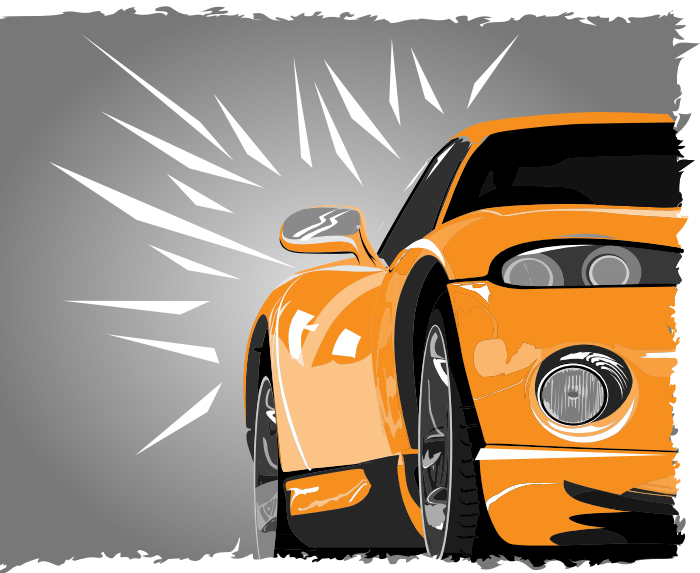
- use and maintain the alarm in accordance with the instructions
- avoid altering any adjustments or sensitivity settings
- for 'back to base' systems, arrange with the alarm company to control extended sounding
- if possible, advise the council and the police of a contact person you trust who can enter the premises to turn off a faulty alarm when you are absent.



## Is there an alternative to noisy alarms to protect property?

The National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council's research suggests that an electronic engine immobiliser is the best deterrent against car thieves. The NRMA has also said that immobilisers are the most effective protection against car theft.

Immobilisers do not present the potential noise problems associated with car alarms and are standard equipment on all standard passenger vehicles manufactured since July 2001. New technologies such as satellite tracking systems are also available.



For buildings, continuously monitored 'back to base' alarm systems have features such as an alarm system that sounds inside the house that can help deter intruders without disturbing the neighbourhood, and a telephone connection to a customer care centre to ensure a prompt response to any emergency.

Insurance or security companies can provide more information about systems not based on audible alarms, and their appropriateness for various vehicles and homes.

### **What can I do if a neighbour's alarm keeps sounding?**

Contact the police to find out if theft is the cause of the sounding alarm. Phone either 131 444 or the number of your local police station. Police officers are not allowed to enter unoccupied premises to stop faulty alarms sounding or enter vehicles to disable car alarms, but they can accompany council officers who are authorised to fulfil this function. Council officers require a warrant to enter an unattended residential building to deal with a faulty alarm.

Police and council officers can issue penalty notices for alarms that sound longer than the period specified in the Regulation. Council officers may also issue notices that require a faulty alarm to be repaired or replaced.

You may wish to check with your local police and council about any established response procedure they have to address the prolonged sounding of alarms.



## Penalties

The council or police may issue penalty notices for continuously or intermittently sounding vehicle or building alarms. Penalties for individuals are:

- \$200 if the alarm sounds for up to 4 hours
- \$400 if it sounds for between 4 and 8 hours
- \$600 if it sounds for longer than 8 hours.

These penalties are doubled for corporations.

The time periods before a penalty is incurred have been shortened considerably in the new Regulation because of the impact this noise causes.

The council may issue a prevention notice for a faulty alarm, requiring the owner to repair or replace it. Where a prevention notice is breached, the council may issue a penalty notice of \$750 to an individual or \$1500 to a corporation.

For faulty car alarm systems, the council can, under clause 26 of the Regulation, issue the owner of the motor vehicle with a vehicle defect notice requiring that the alarm system be repaired. If the notice is not obeyed, the police can issue a penalty notice (\$300 for individuals and \$600 for corporations). The vehicle's registration can also be suspended under section 165, or prohibited under section 166, of the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*.

## Summary of provisions

Provisions included in the Regulation are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Summary of provisions in the Regulation**

Situation	Car alarms	Building alarms
Prescribed period alarm can sound	45 seconds – cars manufactured on or after 1 September 1997 90 seconds – cars manufactured before 1 September 1997	5 minutes – alarms installed on or after 1 December 1997 10 minutes – alarms installed before 1 December 1997
Penalty for alarm sounding in excess of prescribed period	Under 4 hours – \$200 4-8 hours – \$400 Over 8 hours – \$600 These fines are for individuals and are doubled for corporations	
Power to enter a building to turn off the alarm	Council officers can enter an unoccupied non-residential property. They can enter an unoccupied residential property with a warrant. Police officers do not have power of entry.	

# managing intruder alarms

Situation	Car alarms	Building alarms
Power to issue penalties for excess sounding of alarm	Council and police officers can issue penalty notices	
Prevention notices	Council can direct the owner to repair or replace the faulty alarm or/and issue a penalty up to \$750 (\$1500 for corporations)	
Vehicle defect notices	Council can issue these notices for faulty alarms Breach of notice can result in police issuing a \$300 (\$600 for corporations) penalty notice and registration can be suspended or prohibited	Not applicable

# Contacts

## **Councils**

Contact details for all NSW Councils can be found on the 'Local Government Directory' page of the Department of Local Government's website [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au)

## **Police**

Customer Assistance Unit  
phone: 131444  
Police Stations are listed under 'Police' in the Business and Government edition of the White Pages.

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## **Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW**

59–61 Goulburn Street

PO Box A290

Sydney South 1232

Phone: (02) 9995 5000

(switchboard)

Phone: 131 555

(environment information  
and publications requests)

Phone: 1300 361 967

(national parks information  
and publications requests)

Fax: (02) 9995 5999

TTY: (02) 9211 4723

Email: [info@environment.](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au)

[nsw.gov.au](http://nsw.gov.au)

Website: [www.environment.](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)

[nsw.gov.au](http://nsw.gov.au)

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