

Audible Intruder Alarms

Noise from domestic audible intruder alarms often results in complaints to our Environmental Protection Team. Most of the time the alarm has not been activated by an intruder, but even so it may continue to cause disturbance to surrounding neighbours for several hours.

If the alarm continues to sound for more than 20 minutes and the Environmental Protection officer is satisfied that the noise is causing statutory nuisance then formal action will be taken to silence the alarm.

The following steps would help to minimise the risk of an alarm causing problems to your neighbours:

- make sure the alarm is fitted with a 20 minute cut-out device
- have the alarm serviced periodically
- provide the Council with details of keyholders who can be contacted should the alarm sound unnecessarily whilst you are away from home (especially if you are on holiday). If the Council has details of keyholders we will always attempt to contact them first
- tell your neighbours how to get hold of the keyholders

Keyholders

The nominated keyholders are two separate people/households (not the occupier) who hold spare sets of keys to your property, so if necessary they can gain access to your property and reset the alarm.

Alternatively a specialist company can hold the keys for you. If you use a specialist company they have to offer a 24 hour, seven days a week service, they must also be given a complete set of keys.

To advise us of details of your nominated keyholders please download a registration form which can be found on the *Noise Nuisance* page of the website.

What happens if my alarm goes off and the keyholders can't be contacted?

If your alarm rings for more than 20 minutes:

- we may have to break in and disconnect the alarm
- we may have to re-secure your premises by changing the locks
- we will charge you for any time and money that was spent deactivating your alarm, this could end up costing you as much as £350

How do I complain about a ringing burglar alarm?

If you would like to make a complaint about a ringing alarm please note the following important information.

In the first instance you should ring the police to report a suspected crime if you suspect that the alarm is ringing due to a break in. They will be able to investigate the matter as far as they are able to and they can begin to trace the owners or another person who has keys (keyholders).

Before making a noise complaint please ensure that the alarm has been ringing for more than 20 minutes as most alarms are fitted with devices that will cut out the sound after 20 minutes.

When you contact us you can help speed up the process of dealing with your noise complaint by noting the following information:

- the exact address where the alarm is ringing
- the name and telephone number of the company on the alarm box

How will we investigate your complaint?

The first thing we will try to do is to contact the police to see if there has been a break-in and if they have any keyholder details. Often alarm owners have not met their legal obligations and the alarm details are not registered with the police or us.

If we have the details from the alarm box we will ring the alarm company and see if they have a service contract with the owner or if they are able to contact a keyholder.

If none of this can be done we will visit and make an assessment of nuisance. If we believe the alarm is causing a statutory nuisance then we will serve an abatement notice.

The notice will require the owner to abate the noise within 1 hour and also to take steps to ensure that the nuisance does not happen again.

Obviously if the property is unoccupied the owner will not be able to comply with the notice, but fortunately we have powers to take action in default of the notice.

What does taking action in default mean?

If after exploring all avenues of contact to get the alarm turned off by a keyholder or the alarm company the alarm is still ringing, then we will contact the Magistrates Court to apply for a Warrant of Entry.

If granted the warrant of entry allows the officer to enter the premises, if necessary, by force.

The officer will then contact a specialist alarm and locksmith company and arrange for them to disconnect the external ringer (bell). This usually resolves the problem but on some occasions the alarm is also fitted with a internal bell, in these circumstances it will then be necessary to establish that the noise from this bell is continuing to cause a statutory nuisance. If a statutory nuisance is still being caused then it will be necessary to enter the premises to disable the alarm.

If the premises cannot be secured again, the locksmith will change the locks.

We will charge the owner for the time and money spent deactivating the alarm.

In addition we have the ability to prosecute for not complying with an abatement notice, although this would be unlikely for a "one-off" incident and would only be considered for regular or repeat offenders.

If you require more information please contact Environmental Protection.