

INTRUDER ALARMS

How would you feel if you returned home from an enjoyable holiday or weekend away to find that Council Officers had cut off your alarm, or had forcefully entered your property and to add insult to injury, charged you for the privilege? Angry, I'm sure but unfortunately this could happen if you are the owner of an audible intruder alarm and have not yet registered **Key holder details** with your local Environmental Health Department.

If you're like most people, you will be able to recall at least one sleepless night caused by a neighbour's audible intruder alarm. This is no surprise, considering that the majority of homes in the UK today are protected by an alarm, many of which are not fitted with automatic cut off devices and therefore have the ability to ring relentlessly until manually deactivated. Noise caused by the activation of audible intruder alarms is a common cause of complaint and can constitute a statutory nuisance under Article 38 of The Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978. Owners and occupiers who seek to protect their premises, whether private or commercial, by installing an audible intruder alarm, or by taking over an existing system on acquiring a premises, therefore have a responsibility to ensure that the device does not become a nuisance to others in the vicinity.

The Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 allows Councils to turn off intruder alarms if they are causing a statutory nuisance.

Noise from Intruder Alarms

Burglar alarm bells or sirens are very noisy. A recent survey found that burglar alarms are considered the most annoying type of neighbourhood noise. When they sound for long periods they can cause a serious noise nuisance.

Alarm owners should do the following to avoid causing a noise nuisance:-

- Register your key holder details the Council's Environmental Health Department.
- Make sure your alarm has a working automatic cut-out device. Within 20 minutes of the alarm sounding, a device must stop the alarm being heard by people living near the property. Both internal and external bells must be covered by the cut out device.
- Opt for an alarm that includes a flashing light to indicate when the alarm has been activated.
- Ensure that the alarm is kept in good working order.

What exactly are Key Holders?

If your alarm goes off, key holders will be able to let the Police into the property to check for a break in. They should be able to turn it off and/or re-set it. This

means that they must have instructions on how to use your alarm system, or be able to contact your alarm company. If they cannot do this, then the least they can do is let the Council Officers know to sort it out – it stops us having to force entry. Ideally, the key holders should be a neighbour and be able to arrive at the property within 20 minutes of being called out. They must have a contact telephone number. Alternatively, you can use a commercial key holder service – a company that will hold your keys, which can be contacted at any time and which can then gain access to the premises. Your alarm installers may offer this service, or may know of another company which does.

What are the Costs of causing a Noise Nuisance?

If your burglar alarm causes a noise nuisance, the Council may decide to prosecute you. If you are found guilty, the Courts can impose fines of up to £5,000 (£20,000 for businesses). This is in addition to you being invoiced for the costs of breaking into your property.

Vacant Premises

You can also inform the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) of the dates you will be on holiday by contacting your local Police Station on 0845 600 8000. You can give contact numbers for yourself and key holders details. The PSNI will also give useful tips on how to protect your property whilst you're away.