



NOISE ORDINANCE LIMITATIONS

INFORMATIONAL PACKET

QUESTIONS?

Additional information regarding the planning process can be obtained at the Planning Counter at 630 Garden Street (805) 564-5578, PlanningCounter@SantaBarbaraCA.gov



WHAT NOISE RULES APPLY?

The City of Santa Barbara Noise Ordinance (SBMC [Chapter 9.16](#)) and General Plan Noise Element ([Environmental Resources Element](#)) contains rules to minimize resident's exposure to excessive noise. Projects are screened during planning or building permit review for potential mechanical equipment noise and other noise issues associated with new development.

City Noise Ordinance:

- Sets noise limitations for exterior **mechanical equipment**
- Specifies **hours** during which construction is allowed
- Prohibits certain conduct considered to be a noise **disturbance**

General Plan Noise Element:

- Requires **mitigation measures** consistent with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- Includes guidelines regarding the compatibility of certain **noise-sensitive land uses**.
- Describes the **Noise Contours Map**, available through the City's mapping application, [MAPS](#).

HOW DO I FILE A NOISE COMPLAINT?

If you have general noise questions about air conditioners or other types of mechanical equipment, please contact the [Planning Counter](#). Contact the [Building and Safety Counter](#) for more information or complaints about construction noise. If you would like to file a complaint about noisy equipment, the Enforcement Hotline is (805) 897-2676. To report an immediate noise disturbance such as a leaf blower or loud music, please contact Police Department Dispatch (805) 882-8900.



WHAT ARE THE TIME AND DAY LIMITS FOR NOISE?

WHAT HOURS AM I ALLOWED TO DO CONSTRUCTION?

Construction times (including preparation for construction) for most projects are as specified in the Santa Barbara Municipal Code Section 9.16.040 and listed below. The Municipal Code also limits hours for the use of leaf blowers, agricultural uses, and mechanical equipment; see the code for details.

7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., daily

Construction times for certain large projects when conditioned by the *Planning Commission* are listed below. Additional mitigation measures may be required for large projects with a long construction duration (e.g., over 12 months) and with the use of certain construction equipment (pile drivers). Please contact the [Planning Counter](#) if you have questions about planning conditions of approval for noise.

7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., weekdays

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Saturdays

Prohibited on Sundays and legal holidays*

**Legal holidays are New Year's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Day After Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.*

HOW DO I REQUEST A WAIVER?

If it is necessary to do work outside the allowed construction hours based on required construction type or other appropriate reasons, the contractor may contact the Community Development Department to request a waiver of the construction hours. Authorization from the Chief Building Official must be received at least one week prior to the commencement of after-hours work.

TO REQUEST A WAIVER, submit a letter to Building & Safety with this information:

- Specific date and time that work will occur
- Exact location of work
- Specific type of work to be performed
- Amount and type of equipment to be used
- Noise mitigation measures to be employed
- Distance of the nearest residential dwelling to the proposed work



HOW DO I MEASURE EQUIPMENT NOISE?

NOISE LIMIT FOR MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT

The noise limitation for exterior mechanical equipment is 53 A-weighted decibels (dBA) at the property line of any adjacent parcel used or zoned for residential, public, or semi-public uses. The City Planning Division has estimated the following setback guidelines for locating **one (1)** small mechanical equipment unit, such as an air conditioner or heat pump, for most residential properties by factoring in the sound power of the source, distance, and surroundings. In addition, minimum zoning setbacks and screening per the zoning ordinance must be provided.

Maximum Decibels	Minimum Distance to Lot Line
> 53 – 65	5 feet
> 65 – 67	6 feet
> 67 – 69	8 feet
> 69 – 71	10 feet
> 71 – 73	12 feet
> 73 – 75	15 feet

City Assumptions Used in Calculations:

1. Decibels are in **Sound Power Rating**. (Sound power is the rate at which acoustic energy is emitted from the source in Watts, independent of its surroundings. The level of energy is then converted to the dBA sound pressure level.)
2. Distance is measured from the outside edge of the unit.
3. Equipment is located within 10 feet of **only one** reflective surface, such as the wall of a house.
4. There is a six-foot tall solid fence or wall along the nearest property line.
5. The installation is for one typical residential equipment unit.

Source: [ANSI/AHRI Standard 275 – 2018, Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Institute, www.ahrinet.org](http://www.ahrinet.org)

WHAT DO I NEED TO SUBMIT?

The table on this page is an estimate only and is not as accurate as a noise study prepared by a qualified noise consultant. The Planning Division will accept this estimate for the installation of one equipment unit meeting the assumptions above. Projects that do not meet the assumptions above, or are under enforcement for a noise complaint, must provide additional noise information. If your project complies, submit the following information with your application:

1. **Site plan** – Show property lines, building footprint, location and dimensions of equipment, and distance to closest property line measured from the face of the unit.
2. **Manufacturer’s Specifications** – Provide the page showing the Sound Power Rating of the unit. For variable speed units, the highest sound power rating of the unit will be used.



WHEN IS A NOISE STUDY REQUIRED?

NOISE STUDY REQUIREMENTS

A noise study is a report or analysis prepared by a qualified noise consultant (acoustical engineer) that identifies: (1) locations where noise impacts are predicted to occur; (2) noise abatement measures which are feasible and reasonable, and which are likely to be incorporated in the project; and (3) noise impacts for which no abatement measures are feasible. If a noise report is required for your project, you will be notified by planning staff during your application review.

The following types of projects require a noise study prepared by a noise consultant:

- Equipment that does not meet the setback guidelines described in the table on page 3.
- If the project is under enforcement due to a complaint about equipment noise.
- A new land use is proposed as part of a discretionary development application that exceeds the average ambient exterior noise exposure levels, as shown on the **Noise Contours Map**:
 - > 60 dBA residential (single-unit zones)
 - > 65 dBA residential (multi-unit or mixed-use zones)
 - > 65 dBA schools, hospitals, nursing homes, churches, parks
 - > 70 dBA hotels, communications, manufacturing
 - > 75 dBA office buildings, commercial, retail
- New commercial or industrial mechanical equipment, land use, or activity that has the potential to result in a significant impact under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), if reviewed as part of a discretionary development application.

EXCEPTIONS FOR MINOR EQUIPMENT

Exceptions to the requirement for a noise study may be approved by the Planning Division for minor residential mechanical equipment if written verification from the property owner and contractor is submitted certifying that they are aware of the City's noise ordinance requirements and the penalties associated with the City's noise limitations, see affidavit form on page 5.

If an exception is granted, final approval of the location of any mechanical equipment will require a noise test using the measurement methods described in SBMC [9.16.100](#), Measurement Methods. Equipment for the test must be provided by the owner or contractor and the test must be conducted by the owner or contractor. A copy of noise test results on mechanical equipment must be submitted to the Community Development Department for review prior to final inspection of a building permit, to ensure that noise levels do not exceed maximum allowable levels.

1 NOISE COMPLIANCE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Complete and sign this form for proposed heating, venting, and air conditioning (HVAC), on-demand water heaters, pool/spa equipment or other mechanical equipment, as determined by Planning Staff.

PROPERTY & RECORD INFORMATION

Project Address: _____ ZIP: _____

Assessor Parcel Number (APN): _____

BLD or PLN Record #: _____

- a. I have read the City of Santa Barbara Noise Ordinance ([Chapter 9.16](#)) and understand that by signing this acknowledgement form I am certifying that the proposed equipment described on the plans and in the scope of work for the application number listed above will comply with the noise limits established in SBMC Section 9.16.070.D. I understand that sound at the property line of any adjacent parcel used or zoned for residential, public, or semi-public uses will not exceed 53 dBA.
- b. I agree to install and maintain any required mitigation measures necessary to reduce noise to acceptable levels per the approved plans.
- c. I acknowledge that, at any time, if the City determines any installed mechanical equipment does not comply with the required noise limitations, the equipment must be removed, relocated, or altered, at the property owner's expense, per SBMC Section 9.16.110 Noise Enforcement.

PROPERTY OWNER:

Owner's Signature

Date

Owner's Name (printed)

Contact (email or phone)

CONTRACTOR: SAME AS ABOVE

Contractor's Signature

Date

Contractor's Name (printed)

Contact (email or phone)