



LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

O-28-23

Noise Prohibition City Code Update

This summary was prepared by the City of Annapolis Office of Law for use by members of the Annapolis City Council during consideration of the legislation.

BILL SUMMARY

Ordinance 28-23: 1) bans gas-powered leaf blowers and high-frequency sound in residential districts, 2) sets parameters for measuring noise from boats on the water, and 3) edits and formats the section to make it easier to read and conform to the State of Maryland legislative writing style.

Section 11.12.020 -- Noise prohibition

Subsection A - Adds a definition coming up later in the section.

Subsection B - Creates a "Generally" category.

1. No changes, but gives the paragraph a reference number
2. (a) explains the following chart. It's not clear in the current code. The "area or activity" category identifies the sound levels that pertain to specific City zoning districts. The maximum decibel levels are the same as the state-recommended levels.

(b) adds how sound emitting from boats on the water will be measured to determine violations.
3. No changes except for a new subtitle.

Subsection C - Bans gas-powered leaf blowers and high-frequency sound in residential areas.

High-frequency sound is measured by its vibrations and is used as a wildlife deterrent. The sound emitters can be painful for audibly sensitive people. Also, there are high-frequency sounds that only children can hear. The ability to hear high-pitched noise goes down as people age.

Section 11.12.120 -- Public peace and order

The part of the ordinance creates a new subsection for noise. It adds enforcement steps and special fines for noise violations.



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A separate resolution increases the fines for repeat or continuous noise violations from \$100 to \$200.

BACKGROUND

In 2012, the Maryland Legislature transferred noise enforcement authority to local governments (HB 190). The Maryland Department of the Environment sets statewide standards and general exemptions.

Our local noise ordinance in the Annapolis City Code (§ 11.12.020) accepts the state noise recommendations as the city's noise regulations.

The Noise Prohibition section of the code was last updated in 2018 with some language editing, leaving the city linked to the general MDE standards.

Local Noise Standards

Municipalities are allowed to set their own standards. In [MD Environmental Code § 3-401](#), state law lays out what political subdivisions need to consider when making their laws and states that the laws must be "consistent with the environmental noise standards adopted by the Department (of the Environment)."

For example, Local entities are limited in regulating noise levels for target shooting in Anne Arundel County and outdoor concert venues.

State Recommendations

Noise Levels - Annapolis matches the state recommendations:

Maximum decibel level may not exceed:	
Daytime hours of 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.	Nighttime hours of 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.
65 dBA	55 dBA
67 dBA	62 dBA
75 dBA	75 dBA



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What Decibel (dB) Levels Mean

Safe Levels (60-70 dB): Normal conversation, background noise in a quiet office, or typical street noise are generally considered safe and unlikely to cause harm.

Potentially Harmful Levels (80-85 dB): Prolonged exposure to sounds in this range can lead to gradual hearing loss over time. Examples include heavy traffic, lawnmowers, and some household appliances.

Hazardous Levels (over 85 dB): Continuous exposure to sounds above 85 dB can be dangerous. This includes loud music at concerts, sporting events, power tools, and motorcycles. At these levels, exposure time increases the risk of immediate damage to the auditory system.

Immediate Damage (over 120 dB): Sounds above 120 dB, such as fireworks, firearms, and jet engines at close range, can cause immediate damage, including permanent hearing loss or severe discomfort and pain.

Noise that's exempted from limits

- Emergency sirens and warning signals
- Railroads
- Motor vehicles on public roads (MSP and SHA address these)
- Aircraft and airports (FAA and MAA address these)
- Construction noise 7 AM -10 PM, but not to exceed 90 dB(A)
- Boats on State-controlled waters (addressed by DNR)
- Residential heat pumps and air conditioners, but not to exceed 75 dB(A) and 70 dB(A) respectively
- Construction on public property at any time
- Sanctioned auto racing facilities from 7 a.m. to midnight; and
- Parades, public celebrations, amusement parks, sporting events, etc.

To read more of the state recommendations that are part of the Annapolis noise regulations - [Section 26.02.03 - Contol of Noise Pollution](#).



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Sound Levels

Annapolis Levels

Area or activity	Maximum decibel level may not exceed:	
	Daytime hrs 7am to 10pm	Nighttime hrs 10pm to 7am
Residential zoning	65 dBA	55 dBA
Office/mixed use	67 dBA	62 dBA
Commercial/Industrial	75 dBA	75 dBA

State Levels

	Industrial	Commercial	Residential
Day	75 dBA	67 dBA	65 dBA
Night	75 dBA	62 dBA	55 dBA
Boats on Water			
COMAR 08.18.03.03	90 dBA		

Sound Reduces with Distance

There is a big difference between sound at 20 feet and sound at 100 feet.

For every doubling of distance, the sound level reduces by 6 decibels.

80 dBA

- at 20 feet away will be approx 54 dB
- at 100 feet will be approx. 40 dB

Decibel Level	Source
10 dBA	Normal breathing
20 dBA	Rustling leaves, mosquito
30 dBA	Whisper
40 dBA	Stream, refrigerator humming
50-60 dBA	Quiet office
50-65 dBA	Normal conversation
60-65 dBA	Laughter
70 dBA	Hair dryer
75 dBA	Loud dishwasher, chamber music in a small auditorium
75 - 110 dBA	Power Boat engines
80 - 85 dBA	Pontoon boat at cruising speed
85 - 95 dBA	Fishing boat at cruising speed
85 - 100 dBA	Cigarette boat at cruising speed (full throttle - over 100 dBA)
80 dBA	Shouting, city traffic noise
90 dBA	Lawnmowers, motorcycle
98 dBA	Jackhammer
110 dBA	Concerts, car horns, sporting events