NOISE AWARENESS FOR BUSINESSES IN MIXED-USE AREAS

Canberra’s businesses are important for the liveliness and economic viability of Canberra’s urban centres. In particular, food, drink and entertainment options bring our centres to life every day and night of the week.

More Canberrans are choosing to live close to the action in mixed-use areas where urban renewal is allowing residences and businesses to coexist. It is important for everyone living, working and playing in mixed-use areas to understand noise standards and responsibilities.

This factsheet provides information for businesses to help you understand the responsibilities to comply with noise standards and the actions you can take to mitigate your noise impacts.

HOW AND WHY IS NOISE REGULATED IN THE ACT?

Noise is regulated to achieve a balance between supporting a range of activities and protecting human health and urban amenity. Noise levels in the ACT are measured in decibels with a similar weighting to how the human ear perceives sound, called dB(A). Noise can also be noted as dB(C), which considers bass sounds that are also felt as vibrations. The diagram to the left is an indicative guide to the decibel levels.

Note: Decibels are on a logarithmic scale, with apparent loudness doubling with every increase of 8-10 dB.

Long-term exposure to high noise levels may have health impacts such as hearing loss, sleep disruption and poor mental health. The louder the noise is, the greater the risk of people having negative health impacts.

Different noises affect people in varying ways—what may be a pleasant and welcome sound for one person could be annoying for someone else.
HOW MUCH NOISE CAN I MAKE?

Noise regulations guide the level of noise a person or business can emit based on the time of day and location. Higher noise levels are permitted in industrial and commercial areas like the city, town and group centres and lower levels are required in suburban residential areas. This reflects the character of each area and reduces the likelihood of excessive noise negatively impacting neighbours.

The table below outlines different locations (noise zones) and the noise levels (noise standards) that apply in the ACT.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOISE ZONES AND NOISE STANDARDS</th>
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<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic centre and town centres (Belconnen, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and Woden)</td>
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<td>Group centres such as Dickson, Kippax, Kingston, and Erindale</td>
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<td>Smaller local centres such as Griffith, Lyneham, Farrer, Richardson and Evatt</td>
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<td>Residential areas</td>
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HOW CAN I BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR?

As a business you need to make sure that you are not generating excessive noise that may adversely affect residential neighbours or other commercial operators. Here are some simple tips for how to reduce noise impacts on neighbours:

Design your premises with your neighbours in mind

- Seek noise management advice from an acoustic professional. Acoustic professionals can provide tailored solutions for your business type.
- Locate noise sources such as speakers, stages and extractor fans in areas where they will have less impact on neighbours.
- Use materials and architectural treatments to lessen your noise impacts, such as double glazing, wall insulation, suspended ceilings and reinforced floors.
- Hard, flat surfaces make noises reverberate. Consider using carpets, curtains or other treatments to reduce this impact.
- Adopt measures to reduce noise transmission from inside your venue to others, such as installing double doors and closing windows when nearby residents are likely to be sleeping.
- If your business includes an outdoor area, consider moving patrons inside to reduce noise impacts when neighbours are trying to sleep.

Other measures you can take

- Encourage your patrons to be mindful of nearby residents when leaving the premises.
- Regularly check and service external equipment such as air conditioners, generators and ventilation systems. Where possible, enclose these units, have noise barriers erected around them or turn them away from residences.
- Consider the timing of operational noises, such as emptying bins, using motorised cleaning equipment and receiving deliveries.
- Discussions between you and your neighbours are a good way to improve relationships and to solve misunderstandings early on.
WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Licensed premises
All venues that sell liquor must hold a licence under the Liquor Act 2010, which is administered by Access Canberra. Noise mitigation measures are captured in a licensed venue’s Risk Assessment Management Plan (RAMP). All licensed venues are, with the exception of restaurants, required to have a RAMP under the Act.

Environmental noise, including noise from amplified music, is regulated under the Environment Protection Act 1997, which is administered by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Complaints of excessive noise will be investigated by the EPA.

For more detail on licensed premises please see the Licenced Premises Section on the Access Canberra website.

Businesses in a mixed-use building
If your business is within a multi-unit complex that includes residential units, the allowed noise decreases by 5dB(A) and must comply inside any unit in the same complex. Any noise generated within the common use areas of such complexes (e.g. residents’ gym) is a matter for the owners’ corporation to deal with.

Live music and entertainment venues
It is important that noise from live music and entertainment venues is managed in a way that balances the use and enjoyment of music venues and the protection of amenity for nearby businesses and residents. If possible, the space with the loudest possible noise (e.g. a live performance area) should be located as far from neighbours as possible. An acoustically well-designed establishment is important for keeping music venues open and minimising noise impacts on neighbours.

Gyms and other recreational facilities
With the rise of 24-hour gyms, exercising at any hour of the day (or night) is becoming more common. Dropping heavy weights can cause loud thudding noises which can travel through buildings as vibrations. Gym operators should consider materials that lessen the transmission of these noises and information for gym users regarding this. It is also important to consider minimising noise from patrons arriving and leaving the premises.

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

The Access Canberra Noise Portal www.act.gov.au/noise covers a range of noise topics and provides resources and contact information on noise.

You can also contact the EPA by calling Access Canberra on 13 22 81 or email environment.protection@act.gov.au

The ACT Noise Environment Protection Policy details how noise is regulated in the ACT.

For advice on planning or building approvals for upgrades to your premises, contact the Land, Planning and Building switchboard on 02 6207 1923 or submit an enquiry through the contact form.

The Access Canberra Event Planning Guide provides a range of information and considerations for running events.