



Noise from burglar alarms



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When the Environmental Health Services receives complaints of noise from burglar alarms, we are able to force entry into the property and turn off the alarm. We apply to a Magistrate to get an entry warrant, we can do this even if the alarm has only been sounding for one hour. Before we do this we have to try and get help from your key-holders. If they are no help, or if they have not been notified to Environmental Health, then we can gain entry. This makes it even more important that you have keyholders who can respond quickly.

If we force entry we usually take a Police Officer with us. We must not cause more than the minimum amount of damage and disturbance necessary to gain entry and de-activate the alarm. We must also leave your premises as secure against trespassers as when we started (apart from the alarm being off). If we cannot get into your property (for whatever reason), then we may have to disable the alarm system from outside.

If your 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).

You will also be invoiced for the costs incurred to abate the nuisance. To save you these costs, this leaflet explains what you need to do to avoid causing a noise nuisance with your burglar alarm.

New alarms – Since 1 July 1993 **anyone** who gets a new burglar alarm must make sure that:

- the alarm is fitted with a working cut-out device, after 20 minutes operation and ideally
- the Council is informed of the new alarm within 48 hours

What you must do

Get a cut-out device - Every alarm installation must be fitted with a working cut-out device. This cut-out device must stop the alarm being heard by people living or working near the property within 20 minutes from the start of the alarm sounding.

An automatic cut-out which stops the alarm sounding would be an appropriate device. After that time, security can be maintained by a flashing light. The cut-out must operate whether the alarm is on battery operation or on mains power. Automatic re-setting is **not** suitable if it results in the alarm sounding for 20 minutes, stopping, re-setting and then starting to make noise again. **All** bells or sirens must be covered by the cut-out device. For example, if you have an internal siren **plus** an external bell, then both should be connected through the cut-out. All reputable alarm companies will know the correct type of system to install.

Organise your keyholders

You **must** have keyholders for your alarm system. The key-holders should be able to undertake two tasks. Firstly, they should be able to let the Police into the property to check for a **real** break-in. Secondly, they should be able to turn off the alarm and/or re-set the alarm. This means that they must have instructions on how to use your alarm system. Ideally, the keyholders should be able to arrive at the property within 20 minutes of being called out.

You must **either** organise two persons, other than the occupier, who each hold keys giving them access to the premises. Alternatively, you can use a commercial keyholder service – a company which 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.

Notify your keyholders to the Police and to the Council

Audible intruder alarms are widely used to protect property from unauthorised entry and are often required by insurance companies. Burglar alarms that are sounding should be reported to the Police so that evidence of criminal activity can be investigated. The Council and Police, however, receive many complaints about alarm systems that sound for long periods of time, causing serious noise disturbance to neighbours and where there is no evidence of a break-in.

Cut-off devices

Alarm systems should have automatic cut-off device fitted to stop the alarm sounding after 20 minutes. Most modern alarms have such a device already fitted, but cut-out devices can be fitted to older, existing systems.

Keyholders

If an alarm system is reported as causing a noise nuisance, the Council will try to contact a keyholder so that the problem can be resolved quickly and with the minimum of fuss. All alarm holders within Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's area are, therefore, invited to provide the Environmental Health Services with their keyholder contact details on the relevant form, which is available on the website or on request by phone. The Council makes no charge for keeping and updating these details. The form can be e-mailed to environmentalhealth@epsom-ewell.gov.uk

Surrey Police no longer keeps or maintains records of alarms and keyholders. Instead they are promoting the Surpol Keyholder Database where residents can register various details about themselves and their premises for an annual charge. For more information about the Surpol Scheme, www.surpol.co.uk

If a Council Officer is satisfied that an alarm is causing a noise nuisance and is unable to contact a keyholder within a reasonable period of time to silence the alarm, then formal action will be taken to abate the nuisance. An Abatement Notice requiring the alarm to be silenced would be served on the occupier by leaving it at or affixing it to the premises. An electrical engineer would then be summoned to carry out the necessary works.

The occupier would be responsible for reimbursing the Council for all costs reasonably incurred in abating the nuisance.