

Freedom of Information request: Reference number FOI2026/00862

Date of request: 25th July

Request:

I would be grateful if you could advise:

- * Whether the London Fire Brigade has a written policy or operational guidance governing the use of sirens in residential areas.
- * Whether officers are expected to use sirens continuously when stationary at traffic lights or in queuing traffic while responding to an emergency.
- * Whether there are circumstances in which a siren may be temporarily silenced while emergency warning lights remain activated, where it is safe and operationally appropriate to do so.
- * Whether officers receive guidance on balancing the need to warn other road users with minimising unnecessary disturbance to residents, particularly during overnight hours.
- * Whether this guidance is determined by the London Fire Brigade or forms part of national policing guidance.

Response:

1. Whether the London Fire Brigade has a written policy or operational guidance governing the use of sirens in residential areas.

Yes. Policy Note (PN) 347 provides guidance on the use of audible warning devices, including consideration of the impact on neighbouring residential properties.

2. Whether officers are expected to use sirens continuously when stationary at traffic lights or in queuing traffic while responding to an emergency.

PN 347 does not specifically address this scenario. Instead, it sets out a general principle rather than a prescriptive rule. The policy states:

"Whilst it is accepted that the audible warning will be required on some occasions, there will be others when it is not and personnel should endeavour to minimise the disruption to their neighbours. However, the safety of personnel and the public must be the paramount consideration."

3. Whether there are circumstances in which a siren may be temporarily silenced while emergency warning lights remain activated, where it is safe and operationally appropriate to do so.

PN 347 confirms that sirens may be silenced in certain circumstances; however, this relates to the testing of audible warning devices at fire stations. The policy does not provide guidance on temporarily silencing sirens while responding to an incident with emergency warning lights activated.

4. Whether officers receive guidance on balancing the need to warn other road users with minimising unnecessary disturbance to residents, particularly during overnight hours.

PN 347 does not provide specific guidance on how officers should balance the use of sirens to warn other road users against minimising disturbance to residents, including during overnight hours. However, the policy does set out a general principle that audible warning devices should be used with consideration for neighbouring residential properties and that personnel should endeavour to minimise disruption to local residents where possible. The policy also recognises that the need to raise awareness of other road users and considerations of public and firefighter safety may override these concerns, with safety remaining the paramount consideration.

5. Whether this guidance is determined by the London Fire Brigade or forms part of national guidance.

PN 347 is a London Fire Brigade policy document and provides LFB guidance on managing ambient noise and the considerate use of audible warning devices. The policy also references environmental noise obligations and the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, PN 347 does not state whether this guidance is derived from, or forms part of, any national fire and rescue service guidance. As a result, this cannot be confirmed from the information contained within the policy itself.

We have dealt with your request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Further information about making a request for information is available on our website: <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/request-information-from-us/>

Ambient noise - community neighbour policy

New policy number:	347
Old instruction number:	MAN:D005:a6
Issue date:	27 February 2004
Reviewed as current:	9 March 2026
Owner:	Assistant Director, Health, Safety and Wellbeing
Responsible work team:	Health and Safety Services

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Noise can have a significant effect on the environment and on the quality of life enjoyed by individuals and communities. The aim of this guidance is to bring to the attention of all staff the issue of noise as a pollutant and provide guidance on how noise impact on our neighbours can be reduced.
- 1.2 Ambient or environmental noise is the noise caused by workplace activities and this can impact on our neighbours. Ambient noise levels can raise the stress level of those it affects, both as an irritant during waking hours and as a cause of sleep disruption.
- 1.3 Any noise that may be prejudicial to health is defined as a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The level of nuisance is dependent on the time of day. (Generally maximum allowances of noise at the boundary of Brigade Premises should not exceed 70db(A) (day) and 45db(A) (night)).
- 1.4 As we go about our day to day activities at our workplace we will produce different levels of noise. This guidance provides a structured approach to reducing ambient noise levels arising from operational and other activities. Although the guidance offers primarily an approach to the reduction of ambient noise levels on fire stations, the overall aim is to raise personnel's awareness of ambient noise to the community as a whole, with the emphasis on a good neighbour approach to those living in the vicinity of Brigade premises.
- 1.5 It should also be noted that there are legal requirements on maintaining and reducing noise levels from those activities that take place on Brigade premises. Local authorities evaluate environmental noise using recognised standards such as BS 4142 (assessment of industrial and commercial sound) and BS 8233 (guidance on sound levels in and around dwellings). These standards help illustrate how noise from activities on Brigade premises may be perceived by neighbouring residents. Although this requirement exists, there is still a need for personnel, equipment and appliances to be operationally ready and able to respond 24hrs a day.

2 General consideration

- 2.1 Consideration should be given to all activities and likelihood of ambient noise levels they will generate.
- 2.2 Examples of this would include:
 - The time of day the activity is to be performed.
 - The essential testing of audible equipment such as two tones which should be kept to a minimum.
 - The location and siting of appliances to minimise noise to residential property particularly between 2030hrs and 0700hrs. (Although operational imperatives may override this).
 - The positioning and parking of any spare vehicles in station yards adjacent to residential properties which may be required to be tested on a regular basis to maintain their operational efficiency.
 - Training activity in station yards including the playing of volleyball.
 - It is also important that personnel remember that all activities which take place in station yards are likely to generate higher levels of ambient noise than would be encountered from within the confines of a building. During periods of hot weather when windows may be open during the day and evening, care should be taken with regard to noise levels from televisions, radios, and any other equipment.
 - The use of the public address (PA) system.

- Although primarily this guidance note is aimed at reducing noise levels, the use of yard floodlights should be considerate to those in adjacent properties that may be affected.

3 Appliances

- 3.1 The requirement to ensure appliances are operationally available 24 hours a day will result in a degree of equipment testing and re-stow of appliances at varying times. Not all of this activity will be planned and therefore consideration should be given to the siting of appliances and equipment at these times to reduce or mitigate the ambient noise levels from these activities.
- 3.2 There are legal requirements on the use of vehicle horns between the hours of 2330hrs and 0700hrs, which include the use of two-tone horns. However, the need for an appliance to provide an audible warning responding to emergency calls provides an exemption. This exemption should not be seen as removing neighbourly considerations when using audible devices whilst responding to emergency calls. **Nor does it allow excessive testing of devices on stations, which is not part of this exemption.**
- 3.3 The appropriate use of audible devices when appliances are turning out from fire stations in response to emergency calls should take into account the location of adjacent dwellings and the need to raise awareness of other road users. The need to consider the neighbouring community who live opposite or adjacent to fire stations, which will be exposed to the appliance noise on every occasion there is a turnout is important. Whilst it is accepted that the audible warning will be required on some occasions, there will be others when it is not and personnel should endeavour to minimise the disruption to their neighbours. **However, the safety of personnel and the public must be the paramount consideration.**
- 3.4 **The Mercedes S3 is fitted with a siren mute button that should be operated when testing the sirens in the station bay.**

4 Turn-out drills

- 4.1 [Policy number 156](#) – Turn out drills provides guidance to station commanders on the use of turnout drills to make sure operational readiness of appliances and personnel. Please note that two-tones are not to be used for turn out drills. [Policy number 156](#) –Turn out drills will not affect this policy.

5 Managers consideration

- 5.1 When considering the siting of any activity, for example training events, it is important that consideration is given to the likely ambient noise levels that will result. It would therefore be inappropriate to position a road traffic accident scenario adjacent to a station boundary wall involving extensive use of the Road Traffic Accident cutting equipment, thereby causing excessive noise to bordering properties.
- 5.2 The positioning of any new equipment, which is to be stored external to existing buildings, should also include an appraisal of the likely noise that would result from its use, taking into consideration time of day. Routine running of station generators should normally take place during daylight hours, at times which cause minimum inconvenience to our neighbours.
- 5.3 Contractors who will be working at Brigade premises are to be made aware of the ambient noise level policy and instructed to comply with the guidance provided.
- 5.4 Where prolonged noisy activity takes place which is unavoidable e.g. for an extended level of time, neighbours should be notified.

- 5.5 Where a Brigade building is shared between more than one staff group, every care should be taken to limit disruption through noise to other personnel.

6 External speakers/PA systems

- 6.1 External speakers situated in station yards will automatically switch off between the hours of 2200hrs and 0701hrs.
- 6.2 The future siting of any additional speakers should be planned so as to minimise their effect on neighbouring properties.
- 6.3 Personnel should only use PA systems and external speakers when there is a need to communicate recognised messages.

7 Dealing with complaints about noise

- 7.1 From time to time the Brigade receives complaints from local residents of excessive noise levels at Brigade premises. In accordance with [Policy number 639](#) - External compliments and complaints procedure, all complaints are treated seriously and investigated thoroughly.
- 7.2 In dealing with concerns related to excessive noise, it is necessary for the investigating officer to establish whether or not personnel have made best efforts to comply with this policy. Where the investigating officer discovers that personnel have not given due consideration to the guidance, appropriate managerial action should be taken.
- 7.3 In order to avoid the risk of complaint, it is important that managers and personnel deal with actions and behaviour resulting in excessive noise as and when they occur.

8 Do remember

- Be a good neighbour at all times.
- Be conscious of the noise you make.
- Reduce this where possible.
- Be aware of the time of day.

Don't

- Excessively sound two tones.
- Use the PA system inappropriately.
- Carry out inconsiderate noisy activities.
- Forget the time of day.

Document history

Impact assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	04/03/26	SDIA	L - 26/02/26	HSWIA	12/03/26	RA	NA
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Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Throughout	This policy has been reviewed as current; no changes were required .	04/01/2021
Throughout Page 3, Para 5.4 Page 2, Para 1.5	Reviewed throughout as current. Addition of notifying neighbours of prolonged noise; local authority BS Standards.	09/03/2026

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Ambient noise	Noise

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification