Article 9.5: Noise Abatement and Control

Division 4: Limits

("Noise Level Limits, Standards and Control"
added 9–18–1973 by O–11122 N.S.)
(Retitled to "Limits" on 9–22–1976 by O–11916 N.S.)

§59.5.0401 Sound Level Limits

(a) It shall be unlawful for any person to cause noise by any means to the extent that the one-hour average sound level exceeds the applicable limit given in the following table, at any location in the City of San Diego on or beyond the boundaries of the property on which the noise is produced, unless the use or activity is otherwise authorized by a special event permit, development permit, or other permit or agreement approved by the City Manager, or designee. The noise subject to these limits is that part of the total noise at the specified location that is due solely to the action of said person.

TABLE OF APPLICABLE LIMITS

Land Use	Time of Day	One-Hour Average Sound Level (decibels)
1. Single Family Residential	7 a.m. to 7 p.m. 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.	50 45 40
2. Multi-Family Residential (Up to a maximum density of 1/2000)	7 a.m. to 7 p.m. 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.	55 50 45
3. All other Residential	7 a.m. to 7 p.m. 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.	60 55 50
4. Commercial	7 a.m. to 7 p.m. 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.	65 60 60
5. Industrial or Agricultural	any time	75

(b) The sound level limit at a location on a boundary between two zoning districts is the arithmetic mean of the respective limits for the two districts. Permissible construction noise level limits shall be governed by Sections 59.5.0404 of this article.

(c) Fixed–location public utility distribution or transmission facilities located on or adjacent to a property line shall be subject to the noise level limits of Part A. of this section, measured at or beyond six feet from the boundary of the easement upon which the equipment is located.

(d) This section does not apply to firework displays authorized by permit from the Fire Department.

(e) This section does not apply to noise generated by helicopters at heliports or helistops authorized by a conditional use permit, nor to any roller coaster operated on City–owned parkland.

(Amended 9–11–1989 by O–17337 N.S.)
(Amended 11-28-2005 by O-19446 N.S.; effective 2-9-2006.)
(Amended 6-15-2026 by O-22109 N.S.; effective 7-15-2026.)

[Editors Note: Amendments as adopted by O-22109 N.S. will not apply within the Coastal Overlay Zone until the California Coastal Commission certifies it as a Local Coastal Program Amendment.
Click the link to view the Strikeout Ordinance highlighting changes to prior language http://docs.sandiego.gov/municode_strikeout_ord/O-22109-SO.pdf]

§59.5.0402 Motor Vehicles

(a) Off–Highway

(1) Except as otherwise provided for in this article, it shall be unlawful to operate any motor vehicle of any type on any site, other than on a public street or highway as defined in the California Vehicle Code, in any manner so as to cause noise in excess of those noise levels permitted for on– highway motor vehicles as specified in the table for "45 mile– per–hour or less speed limits" contained in Section 23130 of the California Vehicle Code, and as corrected for distances set forth in subsection A.2. below.

(2) Corrections

The maximum noise level as the off–highway vehicle passes may be measured at a distance of other than fifty (50) feet from the center line of travel, provided the measurement is further adjusted by adding algebraically the applicable correction as follows:

Distance (Feet)	Correction (decibels)
25	-6
28	-5
32	-4
35	-3
40	-2
45	-1
50 (preferred distance)	0
56	+1
63	+2
70	+3
80	+4
90	+5
100	+6

(3) A measured noise level thus corrected shall be deemed in violation of this section if it exceeds the applicable noise–level limit as specified above.

(b) Nothing in this section shall apply to authorized emergency vehicles when being used in emergency situations, including the blowing of sirens and/or horns.

("Motor Vehicles" renumbered from Sec. 59.5.0403 on 9–22–1976 by O–11916 N.S.)

§59.5.0403 Watercraft

Violations for excessive noise of watercraft operating in waters under the jurisdiction of The City of San Diego shall be prosecuted under applicable provisions of the California Harbors and Navigation Code. Permits issued by The City of San Diego for the operation of watercraft not in compliance with noise criteria of the Harbors and Navigation Code shall be reviewed and approved by the Administrator prior to issuance.

("Watercraft" renumbered from Sec. 59.5.0407 and amended 9–22–1976 by O-11916 N.S.)

§59.5.0404 Construction Noise

(a) It shall be unlawful for any person, between the hours of 7:00 p.m. of any day and 7:00 a.m. of the following day, or on legal holidays as specified in Section 21.0104 of the San Diego Municipal Code, with exception of Columbus Day and Washington's Birthday, or on Sundays, to erect, construct, demolish, excavate for, alter or repair any building or structure in such a manner as to create disturbing, excessive or offensive noise unless a permit has been applied for and granted beforehand by the Noise Abatement and Control Administrator. In granting such permit, the Administrator shall consider whether the construction noise in the vicinity of the proposed work site would be less objectionable at night than during the daytime because of different population densities or different neighboring activities; whether obstruction and interference with traffic particularly on streets of major importance, would be less objectionable at night than during the daytime; whether the type of work to be performed emits noises at such a low level as to not cause significant disturbances in the vicinity of the work site; the character and nature of the neighborhood of the proposed work site; whether great economic hardship would occur if the work were spread over a longer time; whether proposed night work is in the general public interest; and he shall prescribe such conditions, working times, types of construction equipment to be used, and permissible noise levels as he deems to be required in the public interest.

(b) Except as provided in subsection C. hereof, it shall be unlawful for any person, including The City of San Diego, to conduct any construction activity so as to cause, at or beyond the property lines of any property zoned residential, an average sound level greater than 75 decibels during the 12–hour period from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

(c) The provisions of subsection B. of this section shall not apply to construction equipment used in connection with emergency work, provided the Administrator is notified within 48 hours after commencement of work.

(Amended 1–3–1984 by O–16100 N.S.)
(Amended 8-9-2019 by O-21114 N.S.; effective 9-8-2019.)

§59.5.0406 Refuse Vehicles and Parking Lot Sweepers

No person shall operate or permit to be operated a refuse compacting, processing, or collection vehicle between the hours of 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. or a parking lot sweeper between the hours of 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. in any residential area unless a permit has been applied for and granted by the Administrator.

("Refuse Vehicles" added 9–18–1973 by O–11122 N.S.; amended 9–22–1976 by O-11916 N.S.)
(Amended 6-9-2010 by O-19960 N.S.; effective 7-9-2010.)