

Buying an Air Conditioner

Noise from air conditioners can disturb neighbours. Noise Regulations may prevent your air conditioner from being used if inappropriately selected and installed.

Noise Laws and your Air Conditioner

In Western Australia, the noise from air conditioners must comply with the Environmental Protection (Noise) Regulations 1997. The noise from your air conditioner must meet the allowable noise levels at all times. Legal action can be taken against you as the owner of a noisy air conditioner.

Penalties include on the spot fines of up to \$500. Noise Abatement Directions or Environmental Protection Notices can also be served. Installers of air conditioners also have responsibilities to meet noise laws.

In the past many buyers of air conditioners have not thought of the impact of the air conditioner on their neighbours and the air conditioner has needed to be moved or disconnected. To make sure that you can enjoy the benefits of your air conditioner, without intruding noisily on your neighbours, follow these simple steps.

Passive Cooling

By insulating your ceiling, shading windows and ensuring good garden design, the heat load on an air conditioner is lowered. Passive cooling techniques can reduce the capacity of the air conditioner you require. Lower capacity units are cheaper to buy and run and are usually quieter. More information is available from the Sustainable Energy Development Office of the Office of Energy at: www.sedo.energy.wa.gov.au

Purchasing an Air Conditioner

Most refrigerative air conditioners sold in Western Australia are required under law to be labelled with their outside sound power level. When comparing air conditioners, you should check the sound power level label on the unit or in the information booklet.

The smaller the number of dB(A) on the label, the quieter the air conditioner. Comparing labels on units of the same capacity can allow you to select a quieter unit. Room air conditioners are generally noisier than split systems of the same capacity. They are also often put high in the wall, which can reduce the usefulness of fences as noise barriers.

Evaporative coolers do not come with sound power level labels but manufacturers should be able to give you sound power levels for each model. As with refrigerative air conditioners the noise levels between units does vary and comparing sound power levels between units of the same capacity enables you to select a quieter unit.

Installation Position

The position of the air conditioner is the most important factor in making sure noise is not going to be annoying. Getting the position right can save a costly move if noise complaints are made.

The best location for refrigerative air conditioners is generally facing the rear yard. Placing the unit at the side of the house close to the neighbour's house is likely to create excessive noise, as the

noise is trapped and reflected between the walls and the eaves of the houses. A fence has limited value in reducing the noise in this situation, unless it is solid and is as high as the eaves of one or both houses.

With evaporative coolers, some high capacity models when mounted on a roof that slopes toward a neighbour's yard may be excessively noisy, particularly if the unit is on the lower portion of a roof with a steep pitch. The best location is generally on the roof facing the rear yard. Locate the cooler as high on the roof as possible to minimize reflected noise. If your neighbour's land is much higher than yours and your air conditioner is likely to be level with their backyard, the noise reaching your neighbour will be increased.

Negotiating the Contract

When signing a contract of sale and installation for any type of air conditioner, insist on a clause to cover you in the event of a noise problem. A suggested clause is as follows: "The air conditioner, as installed, will comply with the requirements of the Environmental Protection (Noise) Regulations 1997 at all times."

This compliance will ensure that the air conditioner can be used at any time without breaching the regulations. If the retailer refuses to cooperate with this requirement, choose one who will. All reputable air conditioner installers should be aware of the requirements of the regulations.

Be a good neighbour

Discuss noise concerns with neighbours before installing an air conditioner. In many cases an agreement can be reached that satisfies everyone's needs. If there is a problem with noise after installation, talk to your neighbours and find out if there are particular times when the air conditioner disturbs them and consider limiting the hours of operation. Consider other noise reduction measures such as acoustic enclosures and barriers and discuss your options with the manufacturer or the installer.

Other Information

- Guide for estimating noise levels and general information;
- A basic guide for estimating potential noise levels of your air conditioner at neighbouring properties; and
- Other general information on noise from air conditioners is available from:

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PO Box K822
PERTH WA 6842

Telephone: 6364 6500
Fax: 6364 6520
Webpage: www.environment.wa.gov.au

For further details, please contact:

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