



# The Impact Noise Ordinances Have on Waste and Recycling Collection Hours

NATIONAL WASTE & RECYCLING ASSOCIATION



As society returns to in-person office work, traffic is approaching (or in some cases exceeding) pre-pandemic levels. This directly impacts the ability for waste and recycling collection workers to complete their entire routes as fleets get bogged down by traffic issues.

### ***Drivers Avoiding Peak Traffic Times***

Hiring more drivers, while desirable, is challenging given the nationwide labor shortage.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the ability to drive longer shifts is restricted by state and federal hours-of-service regulations.<sup>2</sup> The remaining option is for drivers to avoid peak traffic times in order to service their routes. This is where the issue of noise ordinances and permissible collection hours can hinder collection if reasonable standards are not utilized.

In 1980, the Environmental Protection Agency established limits on noise levels<sup>3</sup> emitted by truck-mounted solid waste compactors of 79 decibels with a further reduction to 76 decibels for trucks manufactured after 1982.

### ***The Advancement of Waste & Recycling Collection Vehicles***

Waste and recycling collection vehicles have exhibited great advances over the last 15 years—from emissions, to safety, to fuel efficiency, to noise generation. The waste and recycling industry is cognizant that even with these improvements there needs to be some restrictions in place to protect the communities that it serves. Such ordinances, however, must be practical, reflect the different natures of the various areas being serviced and balance the competing needs of the community.

New York City updated its noise code in 2007 for the first time in 30 years. In doing so, it specifically addressed waste and recycling collection vehicles. While noting that the services provided by these vehicles are “critical to the health and safety of city residents,” the code seeks to limit disruptions caused by collection noises by setting an enforceable standard to reduce what it terms as “unreasonable noise.”<sup>4</sup>

The city set an 80-decibels limit at a distance of 35 feet from a vehicle’s compacting unit when it is not engaged in compacting a load.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/hours-service/summary-hours-service-regulations>

<sup>3</sup> <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyNET.exe/9101MAHV.txt?ZyActionD=ZyDocument&Client=EPA&Index=1976%20Thru%201980&Docs=&Query=&Time=&EndTime=&SearchMethod=1&TocRestrict=n&Toc=&TocEntry=&QField=&QFieldYear=&QFieldMonth=&QFieldDay=&UseQField=&IntQFieldOp=0&ExtQFieldOp=0&XmlQuery=&File=D%3A%5CZYFILES%5CINDEX%20DATA%5C76THRU80%5CXTXT%5C00000032%5C9101MAHV.txt&User=ANONYMOUS&Password=anonymous&SortMethod=h%7C-&MaximumDocuments=1&FuzzyDegree=0&ImageQuality=r75g8/r75g8/x150y150g16/i425&Display=hpfr&DefSeekPage=x&SearchBack=ZyActionL&Back=ZyActionS&BackDesc=Results%20page&MaximumPages=1&ZyEntry=6>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dep/downloads/pdf/air/noise/noise-code-guide-summary.pdf>



From 11 p.m. until 7 a.m. ET, however, a limit of 80-decibels is in place as measured at a distance of 35 feet or more from the vehicle when the compactor is engaged, but only if it is within 50 feet of a residential property.

### ***Noise Regulations Throughout The Country***

The city of Los Angeles has established that waste and recycling collection may take place between the hours of 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. PT if the container is within 200 feet of a residence. If it is more than 200 feet away, then it may be picked up at any time.<sup>5</sup>

In New Mexico, the Albuquerque Noise Control Ordinance<sup>6</sup> sets the hours between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. MT; however, waste and recycling collection is not covered by the ordinance.

Noise regulations in Washington, D.C.,<sup>7</sup> state that “trash collection by private haulers is prohibited between the hours of 9 p.m. and 7 a.m. ET in residential, special purpose or waterfront zones, or within 300 feet of any of these zones. These rules do not apply to Department of Public Works vehicles, only private trash collection companies.”

These are some examples of how municipalities have addressed the issue of waste and recycling collection as it relates to noise and permissible work hours. Some have very specific decibel levels and distances from residences prescribed, others make distinctions between residential and commercial areas and some have a blanket prohibition during set times.

Regardless of how a municipality determines what is right for its residents when it comes to protecting them from unreasonable noise and limiting disruptions to their lives, government officials must keep in mind that any restrictions they impose should be clear and easy to comply with. Creating this level of certainty will ensure increased compliance from the waste and recycling industry while reducing penalties upon its members that could otherwise be avoided.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lapdonline.org/office-of-the-chief-of-police/professional-standards-bureau/criminal-investigation-division/noise-enforcement-team/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cabq.gov/environmentalhealth/noise>

<sup>7</sup> <https://dob.dc.gov/node/1620796>