

**QUICK
GUIDE**

**HHSRS
Guidance**

Noise

Fixflo



We're continuing our quick guides about the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and how it affects you as a landlord, letting agent or block manager.

When it comes to annoyances, noise is one of those things that can be hard to avoid. City dwellers especially will be exposed to everything from the constant droning of traffic and police sirens to inconsiderate neighbours.

Rural tenants aren't immune to noise either, often finding their tranquility disturbed by the rattling of windows or the banging of pipes which can be just as annoying as constant traffic noise. But even seemingly innocuous noises can be a source of irritation, frustration and at their worst can cause a deterioration in mental health.

In this edition of our HHSRS quick guides you'll find out:

- **What does HHSRS define as noise**
- **How can noise affect the health of tenants**
- **What you can do to limit the effects of noise and comply with HHSRS legislation**

If you're already aware of the Housing Act 1985, the HHSRS adds to and supersedes the previous installment, so make sure you're up to date.

What does HHSRS define as noise?

Although some noises are perceived as tolerable and others less so, these are the usual sources of noise and sound pollution that are most likely to be encountered in the standard domestic environment:

- Road, rail or air traffic noise
- Inconsiderate neighbours or passers-by (loud talking, music, shouting or arguing)
- The local environment such as commercial or industrial premises; including market traders, building works, loading and unloading of vehicles, or visitors to premises
- Noisy machinery or equipment
- Car or house alarms
- Other unidentified noises which either go on indefinitely or come and go regularly



Many of these noises will likely be a result of the location of the premises and out of the control of the landlord. For example proximity to train tracks, properties located close to shops or pubs, or properties neighbouring green spaces that host live events or feature lively locals enjoying themselves. However there are also more ambient noises which may arise from the location of the property, or the structure or conversion of a building, including:

- **Being able to hear conversations/TV etc of neighbours**
- **Barking dogs or other noisy pets**
- **Water sounds, such as river or sea noises**
- **Structural noises including rattling windows, slamming doors, creaky floorboards, vibrating walls etc**
- **Plumbing sounds including toilets, showers or drainage**

Many of these noises can be minimised with some simple fixes around the property.

Of course most letting agents and landlords are well versed in playing up the benefits of being close to amenities, and perhaps telling people that they'll get used to irritants like traffic noise. But the spotlight will now fall on letting agents and landlords more than ever before to ensure they are minimising noise pollution for their tenants.

How noise can affect the health of tenants

Everyone has experienced an interrupted nights sleep at some time or other, maybe thanks to loud music from annoying neighbours, or perhaps choosing a hotel that's closer to the motorway than you thought. But imagine having that poor nights sleep constantly due to a feature of your home.

Health problems associated with regular or sustained noise pollution include:

- **Lack of sleep**
- **Raised blood pressure**
- **Poor concentration**
- **Heightened anxiety or lowered tolerance**
- **Headaches and migraines**
- **Depression or anger issues**

Noise pollution has the potential to be a huge source of stress

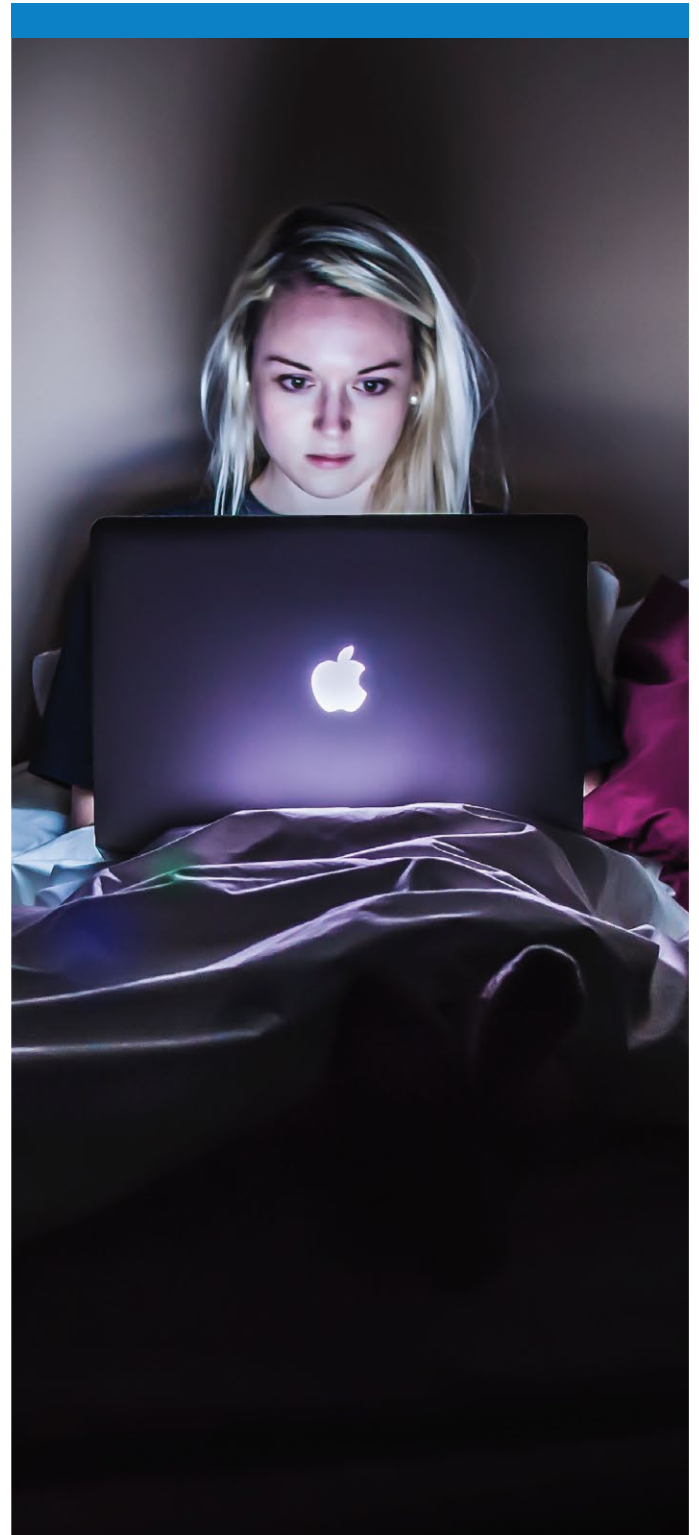


HHSRS Guidance

Noise

Noise pollution has the potential to be a huge source of stress and, left unchecked for an extended period, can cause problems with work or personal relationships. In extreme cases stress and depression can even lead to explosions of aggression or even suicide.

Our homes are where we reasonably expect to feel the most comfortable and safest. So if we can't get the peace and relaxation we need our mental health can be compromised.



How does this affect you as a landlord or letting agent?

The HHSRS is used as a guideline by local authorities to ensure that all housing meets the minimum criteria for habitation. If a local authority believes that a property might contain hazards, they can carry out an inspection and rate the premises on the potential for a breach of the standards within the next 12 months. An inspection might be scheduled because of:

- **An overall assessment of the area or surrounding buildings**
- **A request by an individual such as a tenant or owner of a surrounding property**
- **On the recommendation of another agency such as the CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau)**
- **As a request by the owner or tenant to identify areas for improvement**



It is then expected that landlords will do everything possible to meet (or ideally exceed) the required standards for safe habitation.

Local authorities are within their rights to take action to enforce the standards, if they perceive that the landlord or letting agent has not done their part to minimise any of the hazards identified.

If a hazard is identified under any of the 29 HHSRS categories, including noise, then local authorities can take the following actions:

- **Serve an improvement notice requiring work to be undertaken to improve the issue by a certain date. Work not completed as specified by the set date is a criminal offence.**
- **Make a prohibition order which can include limiting the occupancy for a premises by a specified amount or group of people.**
- **Take emergency action and undertake remedial work themselves if deemed necessary. Landlords may also be liable for any charges incurred for the works.**
- **Serve a hazard awareness notice.**
- **Issue a demolition order, which is unlikely in the case of a noise related issue.**

As a piece of government legislation, compliance with the findings of HHSRS inspections or orders is a legal requirement.

How to limit the effects of noise and comply with HHSRS

Minimising the impact of noise pollution will often involve physical changes to the property. However, some problems with noise pollution can also be managed with ground rules (for block managers, or landlords with multiple properties in a building) or simple equipment maintenance.

Of course you won't be able to cancel trains or change the flow of traffic, or even prevent rowdy behaviour from people walking down the street. But so long as you are attempting to insulate the property from external noise, you'll have done what you are required under the law.

Common solutions to external noise pollution are:

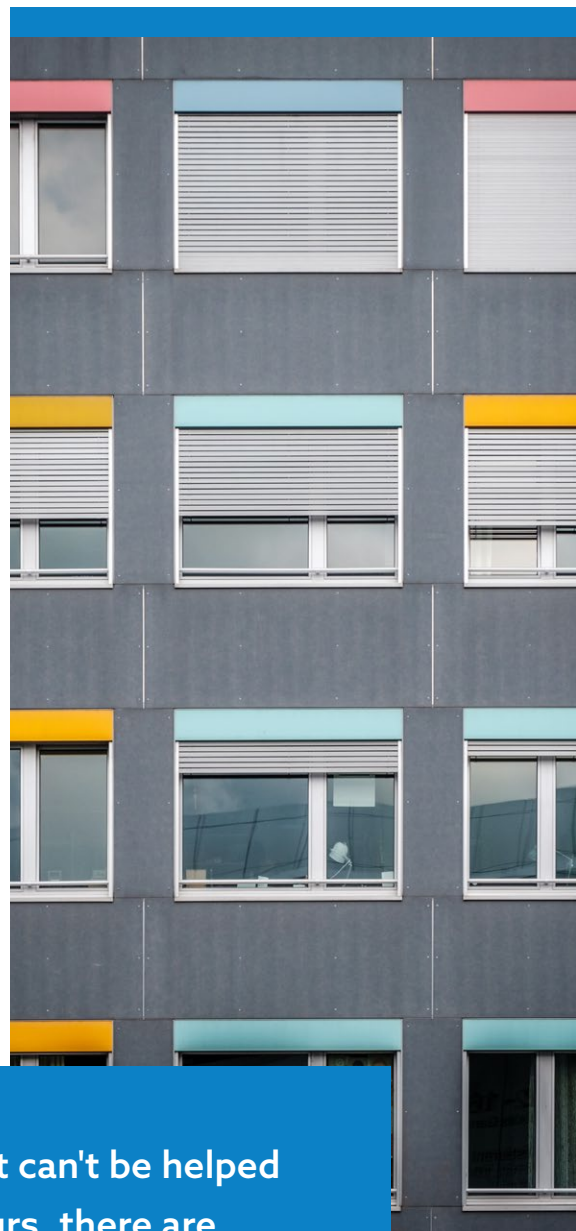
- **Installing double glazing (or triple glazing in particularly noisy areas)**
- **Insulation and soundproofing in walls, roofs and floorboards**
- **Using high quality partitions or party walls to segregate properties, especially when converting properties to multiple occupancy**
- **Regular maintenance and checks on structural features like windows, doors, floorboards and ceilings/roofing.**

Fixing noise pollution inside a building, or block of buildings, can be relatively straightforward.

- **Using anti-slam or soft close doors, cupboards and wardrobe units to minimise slamming**
- **Ensuring plumbing, bathrooms or white goods such as washing machines are located away from separating walls**
- **Ensuring plumbing, bathrooms and white goods are not positioned above bedrooms in other buildings**

Unfortunately when it comes to noisy neighbours there isn't much that you can do. But there are things that can be put in place to minimise disruption and give you something to fall back on, especially if you manage a block or own multiple properties in a building.

Although there certain things that can't be helped such as traffic and noisy neighbours, there are things you can do to minimise disruption



Specifying no noise after a certain time is one way to ensure people respect their neighbours, although this is tricky to enforce and isn't wholly effective if your property is on a noisy estate.

You can also help to set up a residents association to give people the opportunity to meet and discuss grievances with their neighbours. If there is already a residents association, encourage participation from new tenants and perhaps even help break the ice by asking to schedule a meeting between the existing tenants and new arrivals (if possible).

Offering tenants an easy way to give feedback on noise issues in their property is one of the most effective ways to ensure you don't end up with a rapidly escalating problem. Fixflo gives tenants an easy way to report any issues with their property and allows landlords and letting agents to be responsive to their tenants demands. Keeping up to date with maintenance and being made aware of problems as and when they happen is the best preventative measure for any health and safety issues in properties.

Disclaimer

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided, it does not constitute legal advice and cannot be relied upon as such. Fixflo does not accept any responsibility for liabilities arising as a result of reliance upon the information given.

What is Fixflo?

Fixflo is a market leading repair reporting software which is guaranteed to streamline your maintenance workflow. With over 40 languages to choose from, tenants can use their mobile device to report repairs through Fixflo's picture based system. Inbuilt guided advice educates tenants of their responsibilities, allowing them to fix small issues themselves.

A clear, concise repair report is then sent to the right property manager in seconds, saving time and money for everyone involved! Including all the benefits of Fixflo, Fixflo Plus features a centralised dashboard which provides you with a detailed overview of your entire portfolio. Fixflo Plus also automates reminders to contractors, ensuring swift issue resolution.

Fixflo Plus also provides agents with clear, concise repair reports which contain all the information needed to manage a repair to resolution. Because Fixflo repair reports contain all the detail needed, contractors can prepare for the specific issue at hand, meaning that most issues can be resolved in first contractor visit. A complete audit trail of all communication and documentation is safely stored in the system, ensuring that no issue slips through the cracks.

If you'd like to find out more about the Fixflo product range, visit www.fixflo.com.

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