

CALAVERAS HEARS WHAT RESIDENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT NOISE

ORDINANCE BEING CRAFTED TO FINE THOSE WHO VIOLATE SOUND CODES

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SAN ANDREAS - Calaveras County's elected leaders have made noise about noise for years.

Tuesday, they may quietly do something about it. Finally.

On the agenda for the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors is a noise ordinance that, if approved, would allow authorities to fine people who create a noise nuisance \$150 for the first offense, \$250 for a second offense and \$500 for a third.

How loud is loud?

The decibel scale is set with 0 as the smallest sound a human can hear. The scale is logarithmic: 10 decibels is 10 times more powerful than the 0-decibel sound, while 20 decibels is 100 times more powerful, and 30 decibels is 1,000 times more powerful.

A sound of 100 decibels is a billion times more powerful than a 0-decibel sound.

Prolonged exposure to noise over 70 decibels is likely to cause permanent hearing loss, according to federal research. Studies show that background noise over 45 decibels interferes with common household activities such as sleeping or being able to understand a conversation.

Noises such as conversation and laughter can range from 50 to 65 decibels. Federal research found that noise levels over 65 decibels tended to provoke widespread complaints and threats of legal action within residential neighborhoods.

The proposed Calaveras County noise ordinance would set residential neighborhood standards of no more than 55 decibels during the day and 45 decibels at night.

Code enforcers and Sheriff's deputies would be armed with sound meters to accurately detect violations.

Calaveras is a place where residents' dreams about wide open spaces collide with the reality that most people live within earshot of their neighbors.

Authorities often get complaints of everything from target shooting to dirt bikes to rock concerts to ski boats with boom boxes creating a racket.

Calaveras County Sheriff representatives, however, have said they have no ordinance that allows them to hit the off switch or at least fine those who keep their neighbors awake. In 2008 and 2010, supervisors gave county staff the go-ahead to develop a noise ordinance, but the work was never completed.

Now, a proposed ordinance has been written.

In the staff report, planner Darcy Goulart urged supervisors to consider whether fines should be higher than proposed.

"The Sheriff's Department has indicated that these fine amounts may not be enough to deter certain parties from creating a nuisance and the board may want to consider raising the amounts," Goulart wrote.

Some noisy events such as rock concerts or ski boat festivals may generate enough revenue from admission tickets to make even a \$500 fine a small price for a promoter to pay, officials say.

Another issue supervisors will consider is how to pay for the sound meters required to collect evidence.

The devices cost \$1,000 or more. Officials say the Sheriff's Department will need at least four.

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noise on agenda

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors will meet at 9 a.m. Tuesday in the county boardroom, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas. A proposed noise ordinance is No. 18 on the agenda.

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