

Luis Rodriguez

Professor Wood

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A Booming Town

In all honesty, I can't think of the last night I slept through without hearing racing street cars with blaring stereos tearing up the night. At this point the image of my digital alarm clock set at 2am is burned into my eyes. These drivers almost seem to wait until the quietest part of the night to unleash hell. This is all despite a city ordinance that El Paso has in place to protect citizens from such crimes. The ordinance is segmented by zones, time periods, and allowable decibel levels (db). Citizens can call the El Paso Police Department (EPPD) over noise violations; however due to the nature of the crime, warnings far outnumber citations. This leaves many people to take matters into their own hands.

Breaking the 50db residential evening noise level by 20db or more for any period of time is a crime punishable by a fine of two hundred dollars not including court costs. Most car stereo systems break 100db without even topping out the volume knob. With just 80db being enough to rattle your windows, El Paso citizen Jeffrey West had this to say during an interview with *The El Paso Times* back in 2007, "The windows in my house shake almost every day. You can hear these cars coming down the street from three or four blocks down." Clearly, a noise violation takes a more serious tone when the walls of your home can't protect you.

When Jeffery Bell of the Crime Prevention division of the El Paso Police Department was asked how EPPD handles noise violations he stated, "We can cite the first time, but I would say 90% of the time we will issue a warning first." While this is enough in some cases, the city prosecutor's office gets at least ten formal complaints a week from people who the police have neglected to help. This response from law enforcement leaves me a bit concerned. On one hand, non-violent crime should be handled with courtesy; on the other hand, we all have to live together, and mutual respect is part of making that work. Still, I'm not about to get on my robe and slippers to go ask a large group of rowdy men to keep it down.

I propose that El Paso citizens rally together in hopes that stronger legislation than the noise ordinance can be put in place. It's time we do more than just complain or pull our pillows over our heads. I'm tired of sealing my windows, putting on earplugs, and saying a prayer just to get through the night undisturbed. The situation, as I see it, is that these late night drivers have no consideration for people nor fear of punishment. They will continue to disturb the people of El Paso so long as the current situation remains as it is. We need to make our own noise and call our city representatives and show up out council meets. Maybe we can make enough noise to bring the decibels down.