

transportation **ALTERNATIVES**

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Audible car alarms destroy New York's quality of life without protecting cars.

- **New Yorkers hate car alarms.** In 2001, 83% of the 97,000 calls to the City's Quality of Life Hotline were noise complaints, with car alarm calls consistently near the top of the list (according to Vincent La Padula, Senior Advisor to the Mayor). The Census Bureau reported the same year that more New Yorkers are bothered by traffic noise (including car alarms) than by any other aspect of city life, including crime or the condition of local schools.
- **Audible car alarms do not work.** The only unbiased study ever done on the subject — one conducted by the insurance industry — shows that car alarms do nothing to stop car theft. The NYPD has no evidence that alarms are effective, but says they are an “annoying and sometimes unbearable disturbance for residents in their homes.” They “frequently go off for no apparent reason.” And as one of the “signs that no one cares,” they “invite both further disorder and serious crime.”
- **Silent anti-theft devices are inexpensive and effective.** Passive immobilizers cost no more than car alarms (see chart), and cut theft rates in half, according to the insurance industry. Pager devices alert car owners to a potential break-in without annoying an entire neighborhood.

<i>Security device, fully installed</i>	<i>Price</i>
Audible car alarm (with siren)	\$229
Silent car alarm (with pager)	\$289
Silent immobilizer	\$195
Pager to replace existing siren	\$175

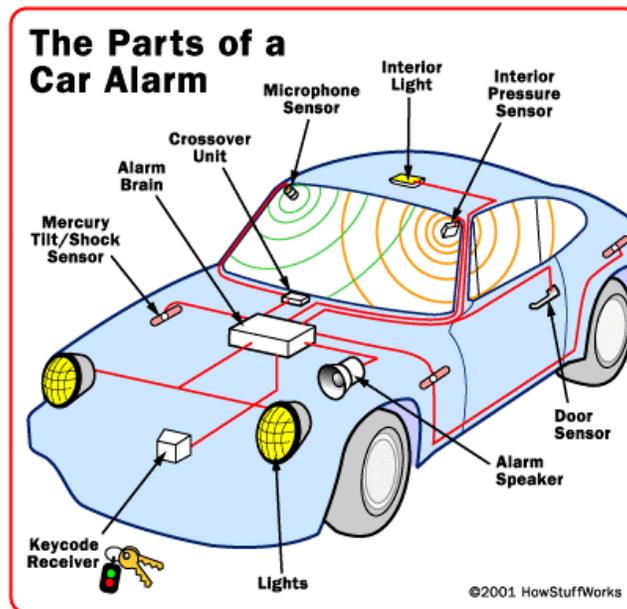
Typical, current prices for audible and silent car security devices in New York City.

The Solution: Ban the use, sale, and installation of audible car alarms in New York City.

- **A ban is legal.** New York City already prohibits the use of noisy aftermarket motorcycle tailpipes (NY Admin. Code Sec. 24-227) and the use of audible status indicators on cars. Summons under these laws are sustained. We can ban car alarm use. Likewise, no legal issues prevent a ban on the sale and installation of alarms — see our memorandum on Commerce Clause issues for details.
- **A ban will work.** Police enforcement of car alarm laws will become much simpler and more practical. Just as important, a clear ban will provide a “codified morality” that will be enforced through social pressures. Laws requiring “pooper-scoopers,” prohibiting cell phone use while driving, and limiting idling to three minutes are rarely enforced directly, but they are still effective.
- **New Yorkers want a car alarm ban.** The two car alarm bills before City Council have twenty-one co-sponsors from across New York City, including high car-ownership areas of Brooklyn and Queens. Unlike the smoking ban, these bills have support across the political and

demographic spectra. Virtually all of the opposition to a car alarm ban comes from out-of-town consumer electronics industry lobbyists.

- **Car owners will buy silent devices once audible alarms are banned, benefiting car owners and local businesses.** The need for car security won't go away when alarms do. Recent history suggests that car owners will flock to installers for silent anti-theft products once audible alarms are banned. When the New York State Legislature banned the use of handheld cell phones while driving, sales of hands-free headsets soared. Plantronics, which claims nearly half the worldwide headset market, reports that New York sales "more than doubled" in the months following passage of the New York law.* The same will happen when car alarms are banned, with installers reaping the benefits. Meanwhile, car owners will gain better security and bigger insurance discounts.
- **Installers will not need to retool, since Int. 448 bans only the audible part of existing alarm systems.** A car alarm consists of an array of sensors, a radio receiver, a wireless key fob, an auxiliary battery, a computer control unit, and a siren (see illustration). *Only the siren would be banned.* Instead of triggering a loud, ineffective noise, this same system can activate a silent pager or immobilizer. Installers already have all the equipment and expertise they need to install silent devices — indeed, 70% already sell silent pagers (see above for prices).



Only the siren (alarm speaker) will be disconnected when the ban goes into effect. A qualified installer can shut off the siren and install a replacement pager in under one hour. There are several add-on pagers available from most installation shops. Source: Tom Harris, "How Car Alarms Work", <http://www.howstuffworks.com/car-alarm.htm>

- **Other proposals will not work.** The car alarm manufacturers are unable to police themselves. They promised the Council in 1997 that a voluntary program to license installers would eliminate the noise; it hasn't. The DEP says that we can wait for the noise code revisions to solve this problem; judging from the meetings we have attended, they won't. Banning sale and installation without banning use will take business away from local dealers and allow alarms to continue blaring in our neighborhoods.

* Source: "Hands-Free and Growing: As states examine legislation to limit driving and talking, hands-free device makers are seeing their sales skyrocket," by Sue Marek, Wireless Week, Dec. 10, 2001