

Vacation Rental Complaints

CDE-013

PURPOSE:

This handout provides general information about vacation rentals and includes recommendations for filing complaints against them.

BACKGROUND:

Sonoma County's Zoning Code allows Vacation Rentals ("Rentals") in various zoning districts. Generally, Rental permits are approved administratively, and neighbors of the Rental are provided with the contact number of the Rental Manager following permit approval. Rentals should be compatible with, and not adversely impact, surrounding residential and agricultural uses. In an effort to ensure compatibility, Rentals must comply with certain performance standards.

What does the Vacation Rental Ordinance regulate?

Sonoma County's Vacation Rental Ordinance (§26-88-120) imposes various performance standards, including, but not limited to:

1. Maximum overnight occupancy
2. Required on-site parking
3. Specific noise limits
4. A prohibition against amplified sound
5. Posting of standards
6. Neighborhood distribution of a 24-hour contact phone number for the Rental Manager

The Vacation Rental Ordinance does *not* regulate off-site impacts, such as street parking, speeding, or the conduct of renters when off of the property.

I believe a Rental is in violation of the required standards. What should I do?

Call the 24-hour phone number of the Rental Manager and explain your issue. The Rental Manager must be located within a one-hour drive of the Rental and should quickly investigate your complaint and address your concerns.

If your complaint has not been addressed by the Rental Manager within one hour of your call, or if the perceived violation is an ongoing issue, you may file a formal complaint with PRMD.

Your complaint should address a specific occurrence and should include supporting documentation, including a written narrative and any audio/video or other evidence you may have. Your narrative should document what time you called the Manager, what the Manager's response was (if any), and if the violation persisted one hour after your call. Your complaint should demonstrate that a specific violation has occurred (e.g., "On Tuesday, amplified music was playing for over two hours after I called the Manager").

Please ensure your complaint is specific. Generalized complaints (e.g., "It's always loud at this Rental") should not be filed.

Do not put yourself in harm's way in an effort to document a violation. Call the Sheriff's Department or 911 if you feel your safety is in jeopardy or if there is an emergency.

I've filed a formal complaint with PRMD. What happens next?

The Code Enforcement Division of PRMD will review your complaint and any supporting documentation. Depending on the available information and the nature of the complaint, Code Enforcement may provide an informal warning, issue a violation notice, impose monetary penalties, or revoke the Rental permit.

The property owner may appeal any violation notice issued by Code Enforcement. It is critical that your narrative and supporting documentation demonstrate that a violation has occurred. You may be called on to testify at a hearing on the matter. You should be prepared to give sworn testimony and verify any evidence you have submitted.

I'm a Rental Owner/Manager and feel I'm receiving unwarranted complaints. What should I do?

As the Rental Owner, you are responsible for the conduct of your guests and for ensuring the performance standards are met. You or your Rental Manager should keep a log of any calls you receive and document your investigation and response to the matter. You or your Rental Manager should also return the reporting party's call and inform them of what action has been taken.

There are a number of rental management companies available that can help ensure your guests are adequately screened and provide professional oversight and response.

You should be aware that, despite your best efforts to ensure compliance, Code Enforcement may cite any violation of the prescribed standards.

Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department

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