



Guest Editorial: Loud Music/Vehicle Impoundment

One of the most common complaints to the Sarasota Police Department is a quality of life issue: loud music emanating from car stereos. From the north district in Newtown to the south district on Siesta Key and all areas in between, SPD receives complaints regularly about drivers cruising the streets with music booming so loud the reverberation rattles house windows, awakens residents in the middle of the night, and upsets small children and pets. The bottom line: residents' peace and quiet, to which they are entitled in their neighborhood, is disrupted too often and that needs to change.

SPD is issuing one loud noise violation almost every day, according to 2008 statistics. The ticket is a civil infraction carrying a \$74.50 fine. Unfortunately, many loud noise violators are repeat offenders turned scofflaws, who inform police they have no intention of paying the ticket. They simply stash it with the rest of the unpaid tickets amassed in their glove compartment and drive away. In 2007, SPD issued 312 noise citations and 53 went unpaid.

To ensure quality of life to all residents, the City Commission amended an existing City ordinance on May 19, 2008, allowing the police to impound a vehicle which is the source of excessively loud music. Under the new ordinance, a vehicle can be impounded if music can be heard 25 feet away; however, SPD intends to provide generous latitude and enforce the loud music ordinance at 100 – 200 feet. That's at least ten car lengths. No one needs to listen to music that loud. Such extreme volume is disruptive, and nearby residents would expect SPD to respond.

The ordinance is modeled after a similar and successful one in Peoria, Illinois, where offenders learned the first time: blaring loud music is not worth having their vehicle towed. During the first 18 months of enforcement, the Peoria Police Department impounded 217 vehicles for loud music violations. There were just two repeat offenders. The City of Sarasota hopes to achieve similar results.

The ordinance is *not* targeted at every day folks who enjoy the simple pleasure of driving with their windows down, cranking up the volume and singing along when a favorite song comes on the radio. It is aimed at individuals who have little or no respect for their neighbors' peace -- people who invest \$1,000 to \$15,000 on elaborate car sound systems with the intent of disturbing the peace.

The City Commission asked SPD to spend several months educating the community about the new loud music ordinance prior to its effective date. Police officers have discussed the ordinance at many neighborhood meetings throughout the City; detailed information is posted on the City's website www.sarasotagov.com; and the City produced

two public service announcements which have been running frequently on television since July. The time has arrived to implement the new ordinance.

Effective September 1, 2008, a vehicle blasting music audible 100 - 200 feet away could be impounded. With each offense, a tougher penalty will be added:

- First Offense = No fine, tow bill (and storage if applicable)
- Second Offense = \$250 fine plus tow (and storage if applicable)
- Third and subsequent offense = \$500 fine plus tow (and storage if applicable)

This new ordinance is a tool intended to prompt a positive behavioral change, ultimately improving the quality of life for all residents within the City of Sarasota. It is a challenge to balance a citizen's right to play loud music with another citizen's right to peace and quiet in their neighborhood. But, the balance shifts dramatically at 100 – 200 feet. No one needs to listen to music that loud in their car. Turn it down. Or you might get towed. Let's keep Sarasota a city we can all enjoy.

About the Author: Capt. Lucius Bonner is a native Sarasotan, and has served with SPD for 23 years. He oversees administrative issues including construction of the new SPD headquarters, and the New Beginning for Newtown initiative.