

# transportation **ALTERNATIVES**

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## **Feasibility of Banning Car Alarm Use**

City Council's Int. 115 would require motorists to turn off their audible car alarms while in the five boroughs of New York City. Some have expressed concern that car alarms could be difficult or costly to turn off, or that drivers would have to permanently modify their vehicles in order to comply with this law. After extensive research, we conclude that these concerns are unfounded:

- Every car alarm installed at the dealership or on the “after-market” can be quickly switched off by the driver.
- Approximately 97% of factory-installed alarms can be quickly switched off by the driver. Only about 3% of factory-installed alarms are difficult (though not impossible) to turn off.
- For drivers who need extra assistance, over fifty New York City installers have pledged to disable after-market car alarms, free of charge, if Int. 115 takes effect.

## **Turning off after-market alarms**

There is no doubt that drivers with “after-market” or dealer-installed alarms could easily comply with Int. 115: without exception, these alarms can be installed to either activate automatically (called “passive arming”) or upon pushing a button on the remote (“active arming”). Alarm installers can switch a device from one installation mode to the other in a few minutes, and most offer this service for free. Car owners with these alarms could easily put their alarm into “active arming” and leave it off while in New York City. Alternately, owners could use the “valet switch,” another standard feature which disables even a passively armed alarm. In either case, drivers would still be able to use their alarms when driving outside of the city.

## **Turning off factory-installed alarms**

Although most car alarms are installed by dealers or third-party mechanics, some are installed at the factory. To find out how to turn off these alarms, we visited fourteen New York City car dealerships, representing nearly every major auto manufacturer, and asked:

1. Do some of your cars come with a factory-installed alarm?
2. If so, does the alarm use a separate siren, or just the horn?
3. Can a driver switch off his or her own alarm?
4. If not, can the dealer disable the alarm?

The results are on the following pages.

Make	Market share, 2002	Factory installed alarms?	Siren or horn alarm?	Can driver turn off alarm?	If not, can dealer disable alarm?	Source
Acura	1.0%	Yes	Can be either or both	Yes: all alarms use active arming	—	Ralph, Service Department, Acura of Manhattan, 662 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave, New York, NY 10036, 212-459-9200
BMW	1.4%	None	—	—	—	Phil Maher, Service Advisor, BMW of Manhattan, 555 West 57 <sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10019, 212-314-9743
Chevrolet	15.6%	Yes	Horn	Yes: all alarms use active arming	—	Joe, Sales Department, Beck Chevrolet, 561 Central Park Ave., Yonkers, NY 10704, 914-965-2400
Chrysler-Plymouth, Dodge, Jeep-Eagle	13.1%	Mostly dealer installed, but a few are from factory	Horn	Yes: see explanation below	—	Kenny, Sales Department, Manhattan Jeep Chrysler Dodge, 711 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave, New York, NY 10019, 212-765-6633
Ford, Lincoln, Mercury	20.2%	Yes	Horn	Yes: valet procedure on every car	—	Raul Brunet, Service Consultant, Manhattan Auto Group, 787 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave, New York, NY 10019, 212-549-2317
Honda	6.4%	Yes	Horn	Yes: all alarms use active arming	—	Peter, Service Department, Honda At Martin's Manhattan, 700 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave, New York, NY 10019, 212-957-6700
Hyundai	2.2%	Yes	Both	Yes: all alarms can be put into active arming. If you want passive arming, there's also a valet switch.	—	Edward Thornton, Service Manager Hyundai of Manhattan, 646 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave, New York, NY 10036, 212-459-1500 x 20
Mazda	1.5%	Yes	Horn	Yes: all alarms use active arming	—	Lyn, Service Department, Koepfel Mazda, 43-43 Northern Blvd, L.I.C., NY 11101, 718-361-6900
Mitsubishi	2.0%	Yes	Horn	No	No	Robert Pineman, Service Advisor, Potamkin Mitsubishi, 706-712 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave., New York, NY 10019, 212-433-1733
Nissan	3.9%	Yes	Horn	Yes: all alarms use active arming	—	Jack, Sales Department, AutoTech Nissan, 622 W. 57 <sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10019, 212-489-1091
Pontiac, Buick, GMC	8.9%	Yes	Horn	Yes: all alarms use active arming	—	Angelo Kampanis, Service Manager, Regan Pontiac Buick GMC, 39-10A 43 <sup>rd</sup> St., L.I.C., NY 11101, 718-706-1435

Saturn	1.7%	Yes	Horn	Yes: all alarms use active arming	—	Elena, Service Department, Saturn of Long Island City, 35-49 Steinway St., L.I.C., NY 11101, 718-786-1500
Toyota	9.0%	None	—	—	—	Anthony JaKup, Assistant Service Manager, Toyota of Manhattan, 614 W. 56 <sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10019, 212-541-8470
Volvo	0.7%	Yes	Horn	No	We could cut the wire from the sensors to the alarm	Sean Clarke, Assistant Service Manager, Martin's Volvo, 677 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave., New York, NY 10019, 212-489-1841 x317
Other	12.4%					

Market share data from Automotive News, Market Data Book, May 2003, pp. 40, "U.S. car and total light-vehicle sales history." Data include sales of both cars and light trucks. We assume that current market share approximately reflects the types of vehicles now on New York City streets. More detailed information about the make, model, and model years of vehicles registered in New York City is available for \$1800 from the R. L. Polk Company. Dealers were visited on 3/12/04 and 3/19/04.

Chrysler vehicles come with a passive arming alarm, which goes on automatically when the driver locks the doors using the car's remote, the car key, or the power lock button. The alarm does not go on when doors are locked manually using the "plunger" button on the door. Additionally, Chrysler dealers have a machine to quickly reprogram the car's computer and turn off the alarm completely.

Note that the vast majority of factory-installed alarm can be easily switched off by the driver, in the same fashion as after-market alarms. We found only two exceptions: Mitsubishi and Volvo vehicles, which account for only 2.7% of vehicles sold. Assuming the remaining 12% of vehicles follow the same proportions, we conclude that 97% of all factory-installed car alarms can be easily turned off by the driver.

### **Assistance from installation shops**

Working with the Center for Automotive Security Innovation (CASI), we have identified over fifty New York City car alarm installers who have agreed to disable after-market audible car alarms at no cost, should Int. 115 become law. These installers can help motorists comply with the law by putting alarms into “active arming” mode, replacing a siren with a silent pager, or installing an electrical immobilizer. We have provided a list of these installers to Council member Eva Moskowitz — more information on this program is available from Drew Robertson at CASI (212-981-2529 x13).