



Position Statement

Eliminating Unwanted and Nuisance Fire Alarm Activations

The International Association of Fire Chiefs, through its Fire & Life Safety Section, adopts the position that the problem of unwanted and nuisance alarms is preventable. These alarms have become a significant concern for fire departments due to the impact upon public safety, fire fighter safety and the financial burden that it places upon fire departments making unneeded responses. As such, the following action items are recommended as a start to addressing the issue of reducing and eliminating fire department response to unwanted and nuisance fire alarms.

1. Fire alarm supervising stations should be tested, inspected and maintained in accordance with the National Fire Alarm Code (NFPA 72), and other locally-adopted requirements.
2. All fire alarm systems should be installed, tested, inspected and maintained in accordance with the National Fire Alarm Code (NFPA 72), and other locally-adopted requirements.
3. Fire alarm central stations and associated local fire alarm service companies should be listed by an approved certification organization, such as Underwriters Laboratories or Factory Mutual, as required by NFPA 72.
4. Fire alarm supervising stations and service companies should be required to immediately report to the fire official any fire alarm systems that (a) are out of service (no longer operational, required monitoring is terminated, system under renovation or repair), (b) cannot be repaired so they are fully operational, or (c) cannot be repaired to eliminate chronic nuisance alarms.
5. Fire alarm supervising stations and fire alarm service companies should ensure they are in compliance with unwanted and nuisance alarm reduction procedures required by the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) and adopted codes.
6. Owners should replace those fire alarm systems that are damaged or operating improperly (e.g., generating nuisance or unwanted alarms) and cannot be satisfactorily repaired. For those systems that are out of service, the fire official may mandate a fire watch, as specified in the applicable fire code, until valid alarm service has been restored.
7. The fire alarm industry is encouraged to develop "best industry practices" which enhance the minimum requirements of the code in order to reduce the instances of unwanted and nuisance fire alarms.
8. Local jurisdictions should adopt programs that effectively address chronic unwanted and nuisance alarm problems, which can be defined by the jurisdiction as those generating a defined number of alarms during a specified time period. This program should require the owner of systems with chronic unwanted or nuisance alarms to have an approved fire alarm service company provide a report confirming that the fire alarm system is fully operational, is being serviced, tested and maintained in full compliance with NFPA 72, and has not degraded to the point where it can no longer be maintained in operable condition without generating chronic unwanted or false alarms. The owner should be required to replace obsolete and

defective systems if an approved fire alarm service provider cannot certify that the existing system can be made fully operational and not generate chronic unwanted and nuisance alarms.

9. Local jurisdictions should adopt unwanted and nuisance alarm reduction ordinances to encourage the proper inspection, testing and maintenance of fire alarm systems in order to deter preventable unwanted and nuisance fire alarm activations. These ordinances should include a fee schedule for excessive unnecessary response to encourage the proper maintenance of fire alarm systems and to offset the cost to the public of preventable unwanted and nuisance fire alarm notifications that cause fire department resources to be expended unnecessarily, impacting public safety and firefighter safety. Under this program, the fire alarm supervising station should provide the fire department with all events logs and other monitoring and dispatch records, as requested.
10. Local jurisdictions should require problematic fire systems to be monitored by a listed central station. In addition, the fire alarm system should display appropriate documentation (e.g., a certificate or placard) issued by the company that listed the central station, such as Underwriters Laboratories or Factory Mutual, in accordance with NFPA 72, section 8.34. The jurisdiction should arrange with the listing organization to receive notification if the certificate or placard is canceled.
11. Fire departments are encouraged to collect fire alarm response data including, but not limited to, the number of fire alarm calls that resulted in an actual fire condition necessitating a fire department response, the specific cause of the alarm condition, nuisance alarm rates for central station service versus other types of alarm service, and the number of fire alarm responses where the situation was mitigated by a fire suppression system.
12. Fire departments are encouraged to explore innovative methods to address unwanted and nuisance fire alarm responses in a safe manner. This includes, but is not limited to, non-emergency responses for some responding units, deployment of traffic signal preemption and reduced responses to fire alarm calls with a high-probability of false signals.
13. The fire service and the fire alarms industry should work together to encourage that all supervising station operators be trained to industry standards.
14. The International Association of Fire Chiefs stands ready to work with fire alarm industry organizations and other stakeholders to ensure the development and passage of industry standards with standard-setting bodies to achieve mutually agreed-upon objectives.

ADOPTED BY: IAFC Board of Directors

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