

RESILIENCE →))))))))) NEED TO KNOW GUIDE

Understanding FRS Automatic Fire Alarm Policy

Fire and Rescue Service Response Policy to Automatic Fire Alarms

The use of Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems play an important role in the protection of life, property and business. Using a wide range of detectors these systems notify occupants of the need to evacuate and, if connected to an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) or Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), automatically seek an FRS response.

Current experience shows that up to 95% of all automatically generated alarm call-outs are either 'false' or 'unwanted'. A 'false' activation might arise due to system malfunction or the presence of interfering substances such as shower steam. An 'unwanted' activation might result from the presence of fire signatures which stem from activities that do not require a FRS response, such as burnt toast or smoking.

Whilst good practice in the selection of equipment, system design, maintenance, management, and 3rd party approval of products and associated services can all assist in the management of false and unwanted alarms many FRS have understandably adopted policies that seek further confirmation of the requirement for FRS intervention before an appliance is released. Each FRS may have its own policy which might vary in accordance with the type of occupancy under consideration, and whether the AFA is received during the day or night/week day or weekend.

Adopted policies for response to an automatically generated alarm might include:

- full turn out without challenge;
- release of a lightweight attendance vehicle to investigate;
- call-back to ascertain if response is required;
- no turn out until a 999 call is received;
- combinations and variations on the above.

Where appliance release is challenged the result in respect of a genuinely raised alarm will be a delay in the provision of firefighting services. It is important to recognise that FRS' have no mandate for the protection of property and business, but obviously do assist where it is safe to do so – any delay in attendance will therefore make assistance less likely.

Sources of information

- Local Fire Authority
- Alarm Receiving Centre
- Insurer

Recommendations for businesses having a connected AFA system:

- It is vital that your local Fire Authority AFA policy is understood and embedded into your fire risk management plan for your type of business.
- The policy should be discussed with your Fire Authority, Alarm Receiving Centre, and Insurer.
- Your AFA system should be maintained and monitored by recognised 3rd party accredited service providers.
- Procedures for the management and prevention of false and unwanted alarms should be developed.
- False and unwanted alarms should be investigated and the findings embedded into your false and unwanted alarm management procedures.
- It is vital that the consequence of no (or significantly delayed) FRS turn-out is considered within your overall resilience plan – for example, where 'suppression' systems are deployed for out of hours fire security, if not the FRS, who will put the fire out once the 'suppression' period has expired? (*Suppression systems may not extinguish fire – only hold it until other actions may be taken to extinguish – if these actions do not occur then uncontrolled spread may follow).
- Analyse your business on the assumption that there will be no FRS intervention in the context of both day and night operations. Suppression and extinguishing systems are the best means of providing a timely response to fire at the local level (around machinery), compartment level (room), and building level, when the fire is still small and more easily manageable. These systems provide both high integrity detection and on-the-spot response and could be the difference between losing your property and business, and having 'minor' interruption to business.

