

DALTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Standard Operating Procedure

S.O.P.: ENF-2
Effective: 03/24/2003
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Reviewed: 06/22/2021

Fire Chief Signature

DATE

Title: Enforcement of False/Nuisance Alarms

Scope: All personnel

POLICY:

This policy exists to govern fire alarm systems intended to summon fire department personnel by implementation of City Ordinance 46-30, allowing for assessment of fees for excessive false alarms and nuisance fire alarms, and providing for the severability of the parts hereof if declared invalid.

False/Nuisance alarms are defined as follows:

False Alarm The willful and knowing initiation or transmission of a signal, message, or other notification of an event of fire when no such danger exists.

Nuisance Alarm An alarm caused by mechanical failure, malfunction, improper installation or lack of proper maintenance, or an alarm activated by a cause that cannot be determined.

Examples of alarms that are enforceable within this policy:

- An alarm caused by improper installation or maintenance of the fire alarm system. This includes missing backup batteries, loose connections, smoke detectors mounted near air vents, or otherwise overly sensitive detectors
- An alarm caused by a power outage or storm, as long as there is no evidence that lightning hit the structure or traveled in on power or telephone lines
- An alarm caused by the alarm user or alarm company working on the system or testing the system
- A false alarm activated by the alarm user or an employee
- The occupant conducting a fire drill without notifying the fire alarm company

- An alarm caused by an employee of a business or a family member of a resident smoking near a detector
- An alarm caused by normal cooking where the alarm user could relocate a detector or provide better ventilation
- An alarm caused by dust from construction/demolition
- A burglar alarm reported by the alarm company
- An alarm for which there is no explanation. If a cause for the alarm cannot be identified, (no pull station was activated, smoke was not present, etc.), the alarm system will be assumed to have malfunctioned and the ordinance applies.

Examples of alarms that are not enforceable within this policy:

- An activation of the alarm caused by a fire, potential fire, or hazardous situation (e.g., smoke from an overheated stove producing a potential fire situation)
- A test by the fire department or other regulatory agency
- An alarm caused by someone who is not an employee of the alarm user smoking near a detector, unless the alarm user has not attempted to control smoking
- A malicious activation of a pull station by someone who is not an employee of the alarm user, unless management could relocate the pull station or provide protective covers to prevent easy activation
- An alarm caused by unauthorized tampering with an alarm system by someone other than an employee of a business or member of the family occupying a residence where the alarm activates
- A burglar alarm or elevator alarm that is reported as a fire alarm by an occupant. If an alarm company reports a burglar alarm as a fire alarm, the response qualifies under the policy
- A beeping smoke detector in a residence that the occupant wishes the fire department to check

Occupant Negligence

In cases where someone's negligence causes a fire alarm to activate, it is important to determine who caused the alarm and his/her relationship to the alarm user. If an alarm is caused by a fire alarm user or an agent or employee, the policy applies. These would include the property manager and his/her staff, employees of the business occupying the building, and persons using the building under contract with the business. Occupants of a residence where an alarm occurs also qualify. This policy does not apply if the alarm is caused by someone who is not the alarm user or an agent or an employee unless the alarm user could have taken reasonable measures to prevent the false alarm.

Incident Commander Responsibilities

This policy is intended to reduce the number of false alarm responses within city limits. Upon response to a false alarm, it will be the responsibility of the Incident Commander to determine (1) if the cause of the false alarm fits the definition of a false/nuisance alarm as defined above, (2) to see that the fire incident report is completed accurately with regard to the response so that proper warnings and/or citations can be issued, (3) to provide the Fire Safety Division with applicable incident reports for the calendar year (January 1 – December 31).

When deciding whether the policy applies to a false/nuisance alarm, the basic question to be answered is, "Could the alarm user (e.g., owner, occupant, or manager) have reasonably prevented the false alarm from occurring?" If the answer is yes, then the policy applies.

Reasonable prevention of false/nuisance alarms includes but is not limited to:

- having the system installed and maintained properly
- prohibiting smoking near detectors
- providing protective guards over pull stations that are prone to malicious alarms
- ensuring that smoke from normal cooking activities is ventilated
- ensuring that contractors working in a building take steps to prevent dust from setting off detectors
- notifying monitors of potential work/maintenance and instruction to disallow transmission of alarm notification until returned to active status when complete

Documenting False/Nuisance Alarms

When a false/nuisance alarm fits the definitions listed above, it must be recorded as such. The Incident Commander should provide a brief description of what appears to have caused the alarm in the narrative section of the incident report. To ensure proper identification of the person(s) responsible for the fire alarm and the correct location of the alarm activation, it is important to include the owner/occupant name(s) in the incident report. In cases where there are several buildings at the same address, the specific building and business name must also be identified in the report.

Review of Incident Reports

Incident reports will be reviewed regularly to identify recurring false alarms as defined by the code. When two false alarms have occurred at the same location within a calendar year, a certified letter with return receipt will be sent by the fire department to the alarm user informing him or her of the responses and of the code. This will be repeated after the third response. After the fourth response and any additional responses within the calendar year, the appropriate actions will be taken by Fire Safety Division.