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Public Safety False Alarm Reduction Professionals

FARA POSITIONS MANUAL

Produced by the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA)

FARA Positions

Introduction

The False Alarm Reduction Association is an association primarily of persons employed by government and public safety agencies in charge of, or working in, False Alarm Reduction Units.

FARA has adopted the following positions to help users, industry and government deal with False Alarm Reduction.

- ANSI-SIA CP-01 Control Panel Standard
- Cancel and Abort Signals
- Do It Yourself (DIY) Alarm Systems
- Duress or Hostage Codes
- Enhanced Call Verification (ECV)
- NFPA 731
- Single-Action Panic Buttons
- Verified Response

FARA Positions

ANSI-SIA CP-01 Control Panel Standard

Position: FARA recommends that:

- All *municipalities and counties* require alarm dealers to install ANSI-SIA CP-01 Control Panel Standard (CP-01 Standard) compliant panels in new installations; and
- All *alarm dealers* voluntarily install CP-01 Standard compliant panels in new installations even if it is not required.

Explanation: The CP-01 Standard was created to address the fact that most false alarms caused by user errors occur during entry to, and exit from, alarm sites. Common scenarios addressed by the standard include:

- User Arms - Exits - Re-enters…
- User Arms - Fails to Exit in time…
- User Arms - Building still occupied…
- User Arms - Exits through Wrong Door…
- User Arms - Fails to exit at all...
- User enters - forgets code…
- User enters - fails to disarm within delay time…
- User enters - unfamiliar with system...
- User enters - through the wrong door…

Industry committees concluded that false alarms caused by these common occurrences can be significantly reduced by changing panel features and programming to conform to the CP-01 Standard. Control panels that comply with the CP-01 Standard come programmed from the factory to default settings that will result in the maximum reduction of false alarms.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has passed a resolution urging municipalities and counties to require the CP-01 Standard for all alarm control panels and calling for panel manufacturers to comply with the standard in producing all new panels.

FARA does not encourage required replacement of equipment for users without a history of false alarms.

Cancel and Abort Signals

Position: FARA recommends the widespread and immediate implementation by all central monitoring stations and alarm companies of a procedure whereby no request for law enforcement dispatch is made when an abort or cancel signal is received.

Explanation: Many alarm system control panels will send a cancel or abort signal if an authorized user enters a correct code to disarm (turn off) the alarm system after an alarm has been activated. In some cases, if the alarm is cancelled fast enough, the cancel or abort signal is the only signal sent to the central station. In other cases, the cancel or abort signal is sent after an alarm signal is sent. In either case, the cancel or abort signal is only sent if and when it is initiated by an authorized user at the alarm site. The alarm user may leave the alarm site or fail to answer the call to verify the alarm from the central station, because they assume that no further action is required of them when they use their code to cancel or abort the alarm.

Not requesting a law enforcement dispatch when an abort or cancel signal is received is a tool to reduce calls for service from alarm activations without reducing the crime deterrent and crime prevention benefits that alarm systems provide the community. Reducing dispatch requests frees up public safety resources, which can then be directed to crime prevention, community policing and homeland security initiatives without expending additional resources to do so. This procedure also reduces the costs to the alarm user since it avoids a false alarm fine or fee for an alarm that was cancelled by the alarm user.

Do It Yourself (DIY) Alarm Systems

Position: FARA believes that each community has a right to enact whatever false alarm solution best meets its needs. FARA also believes that Do It Yourself Systems should be considered in your alarm ordinance in the following ways.

- Your ordinance should prohibit a do it yourself alarm system from directly dialing or otherwise contacting public safety.
- Any registration or permitting requirements and fines or fees and/or response limitations that apply to the user for a professionally installed system should apply to the user with a do it yourself system.
- You should consider requiring an inspection by a professional alarm technician for systems that have too many alarms.
- If the alarm user calls in a dispatch request to public safety based on a do it yourself system and it turns out to be a false alarm, the same fees and/or response limitations that apply to professionally installed systems should apply.

Explanation: Do It Yourself or DIY systems are alarm systems that are installed by the alarm user or consumer. FARA believes that because Do It Yourself systems can be a significant source of false alarms localities should consider the following:

- Improper selection and or location of sensors can lead to false alarms.
- Improper selection and or programming of control equipment can lead to false alarms.
- Improper or insufficient training of alarm users can lead to false alarms.
- Alarm system professionals undergo classroom and on the job training to learn how to design, install and maintain alarm systems to reduce false alarms.
- Alarm system professionals enjoy the support of manufacturers and distributors to help them select the appropriate sensors and controls equipment to reduce false alarms.
- Consumers, who design, install and maintain their own alarm systems do not enjoy the benefits of this training and support.
- Retail stores and/or mail order vendors of Do It Yourself alarm systems rarely offer the alarm user sufficient training on the impact of false alarms and how to avoid them.

- Do It Yourself alarm systems may be monitored by a professional alarm company or may contact the user who then calls in public safety to request a response to the alarm activation.
- Do It Yourself alarm systems have the capability to contact a 911 center directly by dialing 911 or a non-emergency number.

Duress, Panic or Emergency

Position: encourages alarm companies to:

- Limit using duress codes and any silent system where no call is made to the alarm site to only those alarm users who can demonstrate an extreme need.
- Train users on when to use the codes or buttons and on the benefits of using 9-1-1 to relay full information about the emergency.
- Recommend using the 9-1-1 system in an emergency situation to obtain the most appropriate response and allow more information to be passed on to the responding officers. Calling 9-1-1 allows the operator to offer assistance while help is on the way.
- Stop using single-action panic buttons.
- Use features to reduce false alarms including:
    - recessing the buttons,
    - requiring 2 buttons to be pressed,
    - requiring a button to be pressed for at least 2 seconds,
    - using covers to protect the button and
    - triggering an audible alarm.
- Make a call to the alarm site before dispatch is requested on all signals received from these devices.

Explanation: When implemented without appropriate safeguards, buttons or codes used to indicate an emergency, panic or duress situation cause a high incidence of false alarms. These alarms are generally responded to by law enforcement as a possible life-threatening emergency. When these systems send a silent alarm that generates an immediate dispatch request, alarm users are denied the opportunity to cancel a false alarm. This creates an undesirable, dangerous situation for both the alarm user and the law enforcement personnel.

Duress Codes Can Lead To False Alarms.

- A duress or hostage code ("Duress Code") allows an alarm user to turn off an alarm system by entering a special code in the system's keypad which then sends a signal to the alarm company that the alarm user is being held hostage.
- When the alarm company receives a duress code, they report a silent alarm indicating a hostage situation to law enforcement. Many companies do not call the alarm user before reporting the alarm.
- When an alarm user enters the Duress Code by mistake, because the alarm is silent, the user is not aware that armed law enforcement personnel may be responding. This creates a dangerous situation for both the alarm user and law enforcement personnel.

Three Styles Of Panic Buttons Can Lead To False Alarms.

- **Portable Key fobs**, used to allow alarm users to arm or disarm their systems, often have a single-action panic button that can too easily be activated. Key fobs regularly find their way into the hands of children, who regard the fobs as playthings and activate a false alarm.
- **Portable Pendants**, worn by alarm users around their necks, are easily activated when the wearer inadvertently bumps or presses the exposed button against an object.
- **Fixed Location** panic buttons are usually concealed making it easy for the user to activate them unintentionally.

Enhanced Call Verification (ECV)

Position:

- FARA strongly encourages alarm companies to immediately adopt policies which require the use of Enhanced Call Verification as a standard operating procedure, except for duress and hold-up alarms.
- FARA also recommends that public safety agencies adopt policies and procedures to require alarm companies to use Enhanced Call Verification or that laws or ordinances mandating the use of Enhanced Call Verification be enacted on a state or local level.

Explanation: Enhanced Call Verification (ECV) is a process by which alarm monitoring companies attempt to verify the legitimacy of a burglar alarm activation prior to requesting public safety dispatch. Enhanced Call Verification requires alarm monitoring companies to make a minimum of two calls prior to making an alarm dispatch request; one to the alarm site and the second to a different telephone number where a responsible party can typically be reached, preferably a designated cell phone number.

Many residential alarms are tripped when leaving the home. The call to the cell phone allows the homeowner to return to the property and reset the alarm. Likewise, commercial alarms are often tripped as employees leave the property or are caused by after-hours cleaning and service personnel. The call to the cell phone gives the business owner an opportunity to cancel the activation and eliminate the request for police response and avoid a potential fine.

Enhanced Call Verification is a tool to reduce calls for service from alarm activations without reducing the crime deterrent and crime prevention benefits that alarm systems provide the community. Use of Enhanced Call Verification frees up public safety resources, which can then be directed to crime prevention, community policing and Homeland Security initiatives without expending additional resources to do so. Enhanced Call Verification also reduces the costs to the alarm monitoring company since it is less expensive to process a second or third call than it is to request a police dispatch for the alarm user.

NFPA 731

Position: To endorse the adoption of NFPA 731, Standard for the Installation of Electronic Premises Security Systems.

Explanation: The standard lays out reasonable requirements, including equipment standards, needed requirements for backup power, specification of minimum training of design and installation personnel and procedures for conducting and documenting user training, which can be adopted by individual alarm users, alarm companies, state governments and or localities to improve the overall quality of systems and help to reduce false alarms.

Single-Action Panic Buttons

Position: FARA encourages alarm companies to adopt policies which eliminate the offering of Single-Action Panic Buttons, which trigger silent and unverified alarm signals. If offered, Panic buttons should have recessed dual-action controls and be programmed to trigger an audible alarm. There should be a verification call made before dispatch is requested on all signals received from these devices.

Explanation: When installed without appropriate safeguards panic buttons have been proven by law enforcement to cause a high incidence of false alarms. These alarms are generally responded to by law enforcement as a possible life-threatening emergency. This creates an undesirable, dangerous situation for both the alarm user and the law enforcement personnel.

Three Styles Of Panic Buttons Can Lead To False Alarms.

- **Portable Key fobs**, used to allow alarm users to arm or disarm their systems, often have a single-action panic button that can too easily be activated. Key fobs regularly find their way into the hands of children, who regard the fobs as playthings and activate a false alarm.
- **Portable Pendants**, worn by alarm users around their necks, are easily activated when the wearer inadvertently bumps or presses the exposed button against an object.
- **Fixed Location** panic buttons are usually concealed making it easy for the user to activate them unintentionally.

When any of these types of buttons are programmed to send a silent alarm that generates an immediate dispatch upon receipt of a signal, alarm users are denied the opportunity to cancel a false alarm.

Verified Response

Position - FARA neither supports nor opposes verified response, but simply recognizes it as a method utilized by some jurisdictions to reduce false alarms. FARA believes that each community has a right to enact whatever false alarm solution best meets its needs. FARA also believes that communities benefit from a full exploration, conducted in the open with all stakeholders as participants, of the advantages and disadvantages of verified response before such a policy is implemented. We realize that this process may not be as expedient as other options, but we feel it is always superior as communities seek their individual solutions to the false alarm problem.

Explanation: The "verified response" method requires an independent eyewitness verification that a criminal act either is occurring or has occurred prior to requesting law enforcement dispatch. Some jurisdictions are now also accepting video and/or audio verification in lieu of eyewitness verification. FARA believes that when a "verified response" policy is considered, an open dialog between elected officials, law enforcement agencies, the alarm industry, and citizens should take place to explore the following considerations:

Public Safety

- Citizens install an alarm system to protect their property, families, and to provide peace of mind. They may view law enforcement response as an essential element of this public safety tool.
- False alarms can endanger responders who are lulled into the belief that they are responding to another false alarm.
- Law enforcement has an increased demand on limited resources. This is especially true in areas of rapid population growth where demand for service may have outgrown the available resources. Homeland Security concerns have added even more responsibility.
- Not every state has the same requirements for private patrol companies. The IACP "Non-Sworn Responder Guidelines" should be used as a baseline for qualifying private responders to include:
  - Licensing and Background Checks - Does your state require a license and a national criminal record background check?
  - Training - A private responder requires a significant amount of initial training and a commitment to consistent ongoing training to maintain skills, as well as account for changes in service needs, new laws, and response procedures.
  - Implementation Period - Adequate time should be allowed for private companies to staff to a level capable of handling the response load.

Legal

- It is suggested that a legal opinion be obtained during the exploration of solutions for your jurisdiction.

Positive and Negative Impacts

- Departments adopting Verified Response have experienced a significant reduction in alarm responses.
- Officers are no longer responding to unverified alarms.
- Officers can be redirected to other crime prevention and enforcement duties.

- Private responders have no obligation to service all areas of the community. High-risk areas with high crime rates may have to pay a higher rate or possibly not receive the service at all.
- The cost of private responders may unduly impact the elderly on fixed incomes and others who are economically disadvantaged.
- Private response is not economically feasible or available in all areas of the country. Large geographic areas with low population density are unlikely to implement private patrol services.

Financial

- Municipal budgets are tight. Law enforcement agencies are being asked to maximize resources like never before.
- Law enforcement agencies that recover costs for the first response may gain funding for maintaining a larger uniform patrol compliment.

Exploration of Alternatives

- The FARA Model Alarm Ordinance has been extremely effective in managing the false alarm problem when adopted and enforced by public safety.
- A full cost recovery can be achieved by the law enforcement agency by charging fees for permit/registration, as well as service fees and/or fines for chronic abusers. Studies have shown that 80% of false alarms are caused by 20% of alarm owners.
- Outsourcing the administration of a false alarm reduction program can achieve the benefits of the alarm reduction program with minimal personnel costs for the law enforcement agencies.
- Other Procedures such as Enhanced Call Verification (ECV) and standards such as the ANSI/SIA CP-01 Standard for Control Panels have been shown effective in reducing false alarm dispatches.