False Alarm Reduction Association
10024 Vanderbilt Circle #4
Rockville, MD 20850
301-519-9237 Fax 301-519-9508
www.faraonline.org

Public Safety False Alarm Reduction Professionals

False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency APPENDIX

Produced by the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA)

False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency

Appendix
Table of Contents

False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency

How to Calculate False Alarm Dispatch Statistics

Statistics

Statistics form the basis from which evaluation of an alarm management program can be made. When jurisdictions first look at implementing a program, they often have a difficult time comparing one jurisdiction's success/failure to another, as very few jurisdictions gather, calculate and report statistics in the same manner.

Properly calculated statistics can be of immense benefit to a jurisdiction in identifying the scope of the false alarm dispatch problem, which allows the jurisdiction to focus efforts where they will be most effective. Armed with good statistical data, the jurisdiction can then make an informed decision as to what amendments can be made to make the program more successful.

Standards

A standard is defined as a basis for comparison. To effectively manage the false alarm dispatch problem in your jurisdiction, it is necessary to measure the problem. The most effective measure is one that is similar to the measure used by other jurisdictions. This lends itself to the greatest degree of accuracy and provides a mechanism for comparing "apples to apples" among different alarm management programs. Currently there are no established national standards for measuring and comparing false alarm management methods. The purpose of this manual is to establish recommended criteria for accurate intra-agency program comparison.

Definition of Terms

In order to begin comparison of one program to another, it is essential that each jurisdiction use like terms. It is imperative to know, understand and adhere to standard definitions to provide for meaningful comparison of alarm management programs. FARA recommends using the following terminology and definitions:

- **Alarm Dispatch Cancellation** means an alarm dispatch request, which is cancelled by the alarm business or monitoring center prior to the time responding public safety arrives at the alarm site.
- **Alarm Dispatch Request** means a notification to a public safety agency that an alarm, either manual or automatic, has been activated at a particular alarm site.

- **Alarm Site** means a single fixed premises or location served by an alarm system or systems. Each unit, if served by a separate alarm system in a multi-unit building or complex, shall be considered a separate alarm site.
- **Alarm Site Dropout** means an alarm site that no longer utilizes an alarm system, the permit was not renewed and there has been no activity within 2 (two) years, or one where the owner has moved/changed and the permit is no longer valid.
- **Alarm System** means a device or series of devices, including, but not limited to, hardwired systems and systems interconnected with a radio frequency method such as cellular or private radio signals, which emit or transmit a remote or local audible, visual or electronic signal indicating an alarm condition and intended to summon public safety response, including local alarm systems and do it yourself alarm and monitored systems. Alarm system does not include an alarm installed in a vehicle or on someone's person unless the vehicle or the personal alarm is permanently located at a site.
- **Alarm User** means any person, firm, partnership, corporation or other entity who has responsibility for or primary control of an alarm site.
- **Common Cause False Alarm Dispatches** means multiple false alarm dispatches that:
    - occur within a 24-hour period and which are caused by the same equipment problem
    - occur before the alarm company or alarm user have an opportunity to make the necessary repair or modification
    - since correction of the equipment problem, the system has not generated any further false alarm dispatches due to the same problem
    - are adequately documented by the alarm user or alarm company, and
    - for the purpose of fees and penalties, are counted as one.
- **False Alarm Dispatch** means an alarm dispatch request to a public safety agency, when the responding officer finds no evidence of a criminal offense or attempted criminal offense or indication that fire, smoke, harmful gas, or heat exists, after having completed a timely investigation of the alarm site.
- **False Fire Alarm** means the activation of any Fire Alarm System which results in a response by the fire department that is not caused by fire, smoke, harmful gas, or heat. Permit (Registration) means authorization granted to an alarm user by a jurisdiction in accordance with state and/or local law to operate an alarm system.
- **Permitted Alarm Site** means an alarm site that is registered with a jurisdiction in accordance with state or local law.
- **Alarm Dispatch Rate** means the average number of false alarm dispatches per alarm site during a specified period of. The dispatch rate can be calculated for an entire jurisdiction, by alarm business, or for each individual alarm site. Furthermore, alarm dispatch statistics should be calculated separately for fire versus law enforcement.
- **Total Alarm Sites** means the total number of permitted alarm sites within a particular jurisdiction.
- **Total False Alarm Dispatches** means the total number of false alarm dispatches during a specified time period.
- **Valid Alarm Dispatch** means an alarm dispatch request when the responding officer finds evidence of an actual or attempted criminal offense or indication of fire, smoke, harmful gas or heat.
- **Verify** means an attempt by the Alarm Monitoring Company to determine the validity of an alarm signal prior to initiating an Alarm Dispatch Request.

Alarm Dispatch Rate

When comparing statistics with other jurisdictions, it is necessary to accept a basic concept. Comparing the alarm problem from jurisdiction to jurisdiction based only on the number of responses over a given period of time will provide inaccurate results. There are several reasons to support this statement.

- Jurisdictions differ in size of population and in corresponding size of department or personnel.
- Jurisdictions differ in the number of alarm sites and department policy on response to alarm activations.
- Not all jurisdictions calculate false alarm dispatches in the same manner. For example, Jurisdiction A may consider weather related alarm responses as false alarm dispatches, while Jurisdiction B does not. Trying to compare Jurisdiction A to Jurisdiction B in this instance will provide skewed results and may show that Jurisdiction B’s program is more successful, when in actuality, they are really only considering less alarm responses as meeting the criteria for a false alarm dispatch.
- The number of false alarm dispatches may continue to rise year after year in proportion to the number of new systems that are installed in a given jurisdiction. New installs may increase dramatically due to the affordability of alarm systems in today’s market.

- A jurisdiction consisting primarily of affluent users may have many more alarm sites in operation than a less affluent community of the same size. More alarm sites may equal more responses.
- A jurisdiction may consist primarily of commercial alarm sites which, according to national estimates, generate as much as 2.5 times more false alarm dispatches than residential alarm sites.
- Many jurisdictions require some sort of alarm site permitting, but many others do not.

Utilizing the common factors of total false alarm dispatches (responses, arrivals, etc.) divided by the total alarm sites (subscribers, users, etc.), a figure can be reached which can be compared universally and is becoming commonly known as the alarm dispatch rate (average per alarm user). Care must be given to how a jurisdiction calculates total false alarm dispatches. What is considered a false alarm dispatch in one jurisdiction may not be considered false in another. When comparing statistics, be sure you understand the criteria for false alarm dispatches.

Example 1. Sample Statistics

Total False Alarm Dispatches to **Commercial Alarm Sites**	3539
Divided By: Total Commercial Alarm Sites	2542
Police Dispatch Rate for Commercial Alarm Sites	1.39

Total False Alarm Dispatches to **Residential Sites**	6,634
Divided By: Total Residential Alarm Sites	12,679
Police Dispatch Rate for Residential Alarm Sites	.52

Total False Alarm Dispatches to **All Sites**	10,173
Divided By: Total All Alarm Sites	15,221
Police Dispatch Rate for All Alarm Sites	.66

The alarm dispatch rate gives a more accurate picture of how many false alarm dispatches are occurring per site per a specific time period being measured. It also more accurately reflects changes in alarm activity over time whether it is up or down. The alarm dispatch rate is one that can be evenly compared between jurisdictions, provided false alarms are calculated in the same manner, regardless of the size of the jurisdictions or the number of alarm systems installed in each.

Determining Total Alarm Sites

The only true method to determine how many alarm systems are installed in a given jurisdiction is to require some form of permitting of alarm sites. To develop accurate comparisons, you must know how many alarm sites are in operation. There are several types of permitting:

- Renewable – on an annual basis – this requires each alarm user to renew the permit every year.
- Renewable – on a biennial basis – this requires each alarm user to renew the permit once every two years.
- Renewable – on a triennial or longer basis – this requires each alarm user to renew the permit once every three or more years.
- One-Time Only – this requires an alarm user to register the alarm system when it is installed or activated, but does not require any further contact with the jurisdiction. (See Example 2.)

Annual renewable permits will provide the most reliable and accurate statistics. It provides for continually updated data and more precisely measures how many alarm sites are no longer valid. Given how quickly alarm user information changes, anything beyond annual permitting does not provide for consistent, reliable statistical data. One-time only permitting will give a skewed picture of the true false alarm dispatch problem, as it does not account for alarm site dropouts and will make the alarm dispatch rate appear better than it actually is.

When evaluating the success or failure of any given alarm management program, ensure that you compare programs with like features; i.e., if your jurisdiction requires annual renewable permits, only compare your alarm dispatch rate with other jurisdictions that also require annual renewable permits. Similarly, if your jurisdiction requires a one-time only permit, compare your statistics with other agencies that require one-time only permits.

Jurisdictions that do not require any form of alarm site registration will find it difficult, if not impossible, to report false alarm dispatch statistics with any measure of reliability. Research shows that more than 50% of alarm sites have not had any false alarm dispatches during a specific time period. If records are based only on response to known alarm sites, the statistics derived may be of little or no value as there will be no way to know the actual number of current alarm sites. The message will only be that the number of false alarm dispatches has continued to climb, and there will be no indicator of whether or not your efforts or the efforts of the alarm companies are showing success.

Requiring annual renewable permits is the most accurate, albeit labor intensive, form of false alarm management, usually requiring the services of additional alarm unit personnel. At a time when jurisdictions are faced with reductions in public safety personnel, requests for additional alarm unit staff may not be fiscally sound. A jurisdiction must determine whether this degree of accuracy is worth the additional cost.

Requiring a one-time permit is significantly less labor intensive for a jurisdiction. However, the accuracy of the statistical and notification data suffers. Jurisdictions are not regularly notified when alarm users move and the user may or may not discontinue the monitoring contract resulting in inactive alarm sites and/or inactive permits. Additionally, responsible party information is often outdated and inaccurate. In order to accurately determine total alarm sites, the alarm site dropout rate must be considered.

Example 2. Impact of Dropouts

Alarm Site Dropout means an alarm site that no longer utilizes an alarm system, the permit was not renewed and there has been no activity within 2 (two) years, or one where the owner has moved/changed and the permit is no longer valid.

Jurisdiction A requires annual renewable permits and reports the following numbers:

Location Type	False Alarm Dispatches	Registered Alarm Sites	Alarm Dispatch Rate
Residential	6,634	12,679	.52
Commercial	3,539	2,542	1.39
Total	10,173	15,221	.66

Jurisdiction B requires one-time registration and, for purposes of this example, is the same size department as Jurisdiction A and has identical numbers:

Location Type	False Alarm Dispatches	Registered Alarm Sites	Alarm Dispatch Rate
Residential	6,634	12,679	.52
Commercial	3,539	2,542	1.39
Total	10,173	15,221	.66

Jurisdiction B with statistics adjusted to show alarm site dropout, many, if not most, of which the jurisdiction is unaware, because they do not update their records with renewals.

Location Type	False Alarm Dispatches	Registered Alarm Sites	Dropout	Registered Alarm Sites - (Adjusted for Dropout)	Alarm Dispatch Rate
Residential	6,634	12,679	2029	10,650	.62
Commercial	3,539	2,542	178	2364	1.50
Total	10,173	15,221	2207	13014	.78

Because Jurisdiction A and B register their alarm sites differently, a reasonably accurate comparison of the alarm dispatch rate, without making an adjustment for alarm site dropout, cannot be made. Once the adjustment is made, it becomes apparent that Jurisdiction A has a lower alarm dispatch rate, not because they require renewals, but because they are better at reducing false alarm dispatches and have more accurate statistical data.

The alarm site dropout rate for each jurisdiction may be somewhat different, but it will occur each year. The dropout rate will affect the alarm dispatch rate and, therefore, must be considered.

Example 3: Impact of Cancellations

Many jurisdictions accept alarm dispatch cancellations from the monitoring alarm company after verification, if the jurisdiction is notified prior to the arrival of public safety at the alarm site. Others count them as false as soon as the dispatch request is received.

FARA recommends that jurisdictions accept alarm dispatch cancellations from the monitoring alarm company after verification. Additionally, those alarm dispatch requests, which are considered cancelled, should not be included in calculations of the alarm dispatch rate. This policy encourages alarm users to cancel false alarm dispatches and alarm companies to verify alarms which reduces the number of public safety arrivals, and significantly reduces the average time spent on false alarm dispatches.

In addition, excluding alarm dispatch cancellations from the calculations for the alarm dispatch rate makes a significant impact on the alarm dispatch rate and therefore, provides a tremendous incentive for alarm companies to verify. The following example will demonstrate this impact:

Excluding 953 Alarm Dispatch Cancellations

Total Alarm Dispatches	3,710
Exclude Cancellations	953
Actual Total False Alarm Dispatches (Total-Cancels)	2,757
Divided by: Total Registered Alarm Sites	3,749
Alarm Dispatch Rate	.74

Including 953 Alarm Dispatch Cancellations

Total False Alarm Dispatches	3,710
Divided by: Total Registered Alarm Sites	3,749
Alarm Dispatch Rate	.99

To ensure that cancellations are not being made by alarm users under a duress situation, there are various methods employed by public safety to verify alarm dispatch cancellation requests for intrusion alarms. Agencies should implement a written policy that dictates how and by whom a cancellation can be made. FARA recommends that only the alarm monitoring company that originally requested the dispatch be permitted to cancel the response. Utilizing verifying information that only the alarm monitoring company will know helps to ensure that the cancellation is not being made under duress.

Confirm the caller's identification by having the alarm monitoring company representative repeat back to the dispatcher any of the following information exactly as it was given to the dispatcher at the time of the original alarm dispatch request.

- Alarm company employee ID number
- Dispatcher ID given to alarm company at the time of alarm dispatch request
- Event or incident number as received from police dispatcher on first call
- Cancellation code
- Alarm company 24 hour call back phone number (unlisted)
- Name - Exactly as given on first call to dispatch

Example 4: Impact of Splitting out Residential vs Commercial

Another very important factor in comparing alarm dispatch rates is whether or not statistics are calculated for commercial and residential alarm sites separately. The example below shows how drastically different alarm dispatch rates can be when commercial and residential statistics are calculated separately.

Jurisdiction A consists primarily of residential alarm sites:

Location Type	Permitted Alarm Sites	False Alarm Dispatches	Alarm Dispatch Rate
Residential	12,679	6,634	.52
Commercial	2,542	3,539	1.39
Total	15,221	10,173	.66

Jurisdiction B is just the opposite and consists primarily of commercial Alarm Sites:

Location Type	Permitted Alarm Sites	False Alarm Dispatches	Alarm Dispatch Rate
Residential	2,542	1,322	.52
Commercial	12,679	17,623	1.39
Total	15,221	18,945	1.24

If Jurisdictions A and B did not break out their statistics by residential and commercial and compared only their overall totals, it would appear that Jurisdiction A has a significantly lower alarm dispatch rate than Jurisdiction B.

However, by calculating statistics separately for residential and commercial, it becomes apparent that their alarm dispatch rates are identical even though Jurisdiction B has responded to almost twice as many false alarm dispatches. FARA recommends jurisdictions follow this procedure to show a truer dispatch rate, which allows a fairer comparison with other municipalities.

Example 5: Valid Alarm Dispatches

Although valid alarm dispatches amount to only about 2% of the total, some jurisdictions include them in their calculations of the alarm dispatch rate. FARA recommends that these cases not be included in the alarm dispatch rate because they are not false alarm dispatches. It is, however, beneficial to track them.

Total Alarm Dispatches	3,710
Exclude Cancellations	953
Actual Total Alarm Dispatches (Total-Cancels)	2,757
Exclude Actual Crimes	56
Actual Total False Alarm Dispatches	2751
Divided by: Total Registered Alarm Sites	3,749
Alarm Dispatch Rate	.73

Example 6: Common Cause False Alarm Dispatches

Common cause false alarm dispatches are multiple dispatches that occur within a short period of time, generally are equipment related, and can be counted as one chargeable false alarm dispatch. How common cause false alarm dispatches are calculated can have a direct effect on a jurisdiction's false alarm assessments. For example, assume an alarm site has three false alarm dispatches; i.e., one on February 1st, one on February 2nd, and one on February 3rd. All three were caused by the same equipment problem. The problem has been fixed by the alarm company. The service ticket documenting the cause and the fix has been sent in to the alarm coordinator within the prescribed appeal time (20 days in this example), and no additional false alarm dispatches occur within 30 days.

If all of the above occurs, two of the three alarms are "Common Cause". The February 1st false alarm dispatch is charged to the account, but the February 2nd and February 3rd are not considered chargeable, although they do remain part of the alarm user's account history. For purposes of this example, the February 1st dispatch is the third false alarm and is, therefore, assessed. The next false alarm dispatch occurs on April 10th. Although this is the 6th false alarm dispatch for this alarm site, for assessment purposes, this one will only count as number four.

Calculating Common Cause Alarms

Date	False Alarm Dispatch #	Assessment Dispatch #	Action
January 5	one	one	counts for assessment
January 10	two	two	counts for assessment
February 1	three	three	counts for assessment
February 2	four	four	common cause-not counted
February 3	five	five	common cause-not counted
April 1	six	six	counts for assessment

While common cause false alarm dispatches may be combined for assessment purposes, FARA recommends that all dispatches, even individual alarms combined as common cause, should be counted when determining the alarm dispatch rate. Common cause false alarm dispatches can have the effect of giving a jurisdiction a lower alarm dispatch rate if they are not included in the calculations as shown in Example 6.

Impact of Common Cause Alarms

Jurisdiction A includes all 200 common cause false alarm dispatches in their calculations for alarm dispatch rate.

Type	Number
Registered Alarm Sites	15,221
Alarm Dispatches	10,081
Common Cause Alarms	200
Alarm Dispatches Alarm Dispatches + Common Cause Alarms	10281
Alarm Dispatch Rate	.68

Jurisdiction B does not include 200 common cause false alarm dispatches in their calculations for alarm dispatch rate and for purposes of this example is the same size as Jurisdiction A and has identical numbers.

Type	Number
Registered Alarm Sites	15,221
Alarm Dispatches	10,081
Common Cause Alarms (Excluded)	200
Alarm Dispatches	10,081
Alarm Dispatch Rate	.66

Example 7: Contract Jurisdictions

Some jurisdictions enforce alarm management programs for other jurisdictions, which may or may not have the same ordinance provisions, fees and fines. Additionally, some jurisdictions provide public safety services under contract to smaller cities within their jurisdictions. Because each jurisdiction is unique in its own way, it is recommended that separate statistics be maintained for the primary jurisdiction, as well as for any cities with which you may contract public safety services.

It is important to be consistent when reporting statistics. If the false alarm dispatches to contract jurisdiction accounts are not included for statistical purposes in the primary jurisdiction's reported numbers, it is recommended that permitted alarm sites that are located in contract cities not be included either. Therefore, either include both contract jurisdiction permitted alarm users and their commensurate false alarm dispatches or exclude them both. Including the permits without the dispatches or, conversely, the dispatches without the permits, will have an effect on the primary jurisdiction's alarm dispatch rate.

FARA recommends that contract jurisdictions alarm sites and false alarm dispatches be tracked completely separate from the accounts of the primary jurisdiction. This may assist the primary jurisdiction in obtaining compensation from the contract jurisdictions.

Impact of Contract Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction A with 2,993 contract jurisdictions false alarm dispatches not included, but contract jurisdictions registered alarm sites are included.

Jurisdiction	Registered Alarm Sites	False Alarm Dispatches	Alarm Dispatch Rate
Jurisdiction A	12,228	10,281	.68
Contract City	2,993	0	0
Total	15,221	10,281	.68

Jurisdiction A with 2,993 contract city false alarm dispatches included along with contract jurisdictions registered alarm sites.

Jurisdiction	Registered Alarm Sites	False Alarm Dispatches	Alarm Dispatch Rate
Jurisdiction A	12,228	10,281	.68
Contract City	2,993	2,993	1
Total	15,221	13,274	.87

What Does and Does Not Constitute a False Alarm Dispatch

Many jurisdictions classify some or all of the following as something other than a false alarm dispatch:

- Natural Disaster or Act of God
- Power Company Fault
- Phone Company Fault
- Alarm Company Fault

A jurisdiction that does not include any of the above in their calculations will obviously have a better alarm dispatch rate than a jurisdiction that does. Compare with jurisdictions that classify in a similar manner. FARA recommends that false alarm dispatches created by weather, phone company, alarm company, and power loss are counted, as these types of dispatches can be avoided if alarm systems are properly installed and maintained. It is also recommended that false alarm dispatches created by natural disasters or act of God are not counted, as these are unforeseen and cannot be prevented.

Determining Costs and Savings

Calculating Time Spent per Alarm Dispatch Request

It can be an exceptionally valuable tool at budget time to be able to present statistics showing the time spent responding to each alarm dispatch request. You can also demonstrate in terms of dollars how much your false alarm dispatch reduction efforts are saving your jurisdiction. Depending on the type of software that you have, this time can be calculated several ways.

- From time the alarm dispatch request is received by the public safety agency until the time the public safety responder clears the alarm site.
- From the time the alarm dispatch request is dispatched to the public safety responder until the time the public safety responder clears the alarm site.
- From the time the public safety responder arrives at the alarm site until the time he clears.

FARA recommends tracking time from the moment the alarm is dispatched to the officer until it is cleared, as it is the most accurate in terms of actual time spent on a call.

Calculating Cost of Alarm Dispatch Requests

Some jurisdictions calculate the cost per alarm dispatch request by what it takes to put a public safety responder on the street divided by the average amount of time used on each alarm call. Other jurisdictions calculate the cost per alarm dispatch request by including some or all of the following, if it is utilized by the jurisdiction. Regardless

of which way your jurisdiction calculates the cost of public safety response, be sure when comparing costs with others that the same formula is used.

1. Public Safety Costs:
    Salary/Benefits
    Vehicle/Gas/Maintenance
    Clothing/Weapons/Gear
    Training
2. Support Units:
    911 Operators/Dispatchers
    K-9
    Air Support
    Records Unit
3. Alarm Management Costs:
    False Alarm Reduction Unit
    Outsourcing
    Finance
    Collection Firm
    Lock Box

All three of the above categories are important and affect the overall costs to public safety. However, to actually determine the cost of responding to a false alarm dispatch in categories one and two, time spent in the handling of alarm calls only, as opposed to all other duties, must be included. The following formula will achieve this:

Cost of [choose a category above] x percentage of overall time spent responding to alarm calls = [chosen category] break down for alarm dispatches only.

Calculating Average Cost per Duress Response

A jurisdiction that has the capability of tracking duress responses separately has additional advantages over one that does not:

- Allows for a more accurate billing structure if there are separate fees for duress alarms.
- Duress alarms normally result in a higher level of police response and should therefore be billed at a higher hourly rate than intrusion alarms.

Calculating Savings

Before you can accurately calculate savings as a result of implementation of your alarm management program, you must first be able to quantify how much each response costs and the amount of time spent on each call, how many requests for response were made and how many actual responses were made. For purposes of the example below, assume that it costs $90 per public safety officer per response and takes 20 minutes per call (from the time the officer is dispatched to the time s/he cancels the call).

To calculate the amount of money saved in not responding to false alarm dispatches, consider the following. Calculations the first year of an alarm management program may be difficult, as there may not be historical data/statistics upon which to make a comparison from one year to the next. Comparisons can be made in two different ways; i.e., calculate the number of alarm dispatch requests received and compare that number to how many were actually responded to, or compare only alarm dispatch requests from one year to the next. The first method will give a truer picture of the actual savings per year.

Alarm Dispatch Requests	36,998
Actual Responses - (Subtract this from the requests for response)	16,443
Number of Non-Responses	20,555
Verified Calls - (Do not include verified calls in false calculations)	- 1,569
Total # of Non-Responses to False alarm dispatches	18,986
Cost Per Response - (Cost per officer per response)	x 90
Total Savings	$1,708,740*

To calculate the number of work years and hours saved, utilize the same numbers from above as follows:

Total # of Non-Responses to False alarm dispatches	18,986
Average Minutes per Response	x 20
Total Minutes	379,720
Convert to Hours (Divide by Number of Minutes in an Hour)	÷ 60
Total Number of Hours Saved (represents the hours saved in one year)	6,328*

When comparing statistics it is also important for jurisdictions to seek information from other municipalities of the same approximate size. Additionally, comparing data with jurisdictions in the same County or State may also be more meaningful depending on whether or not there are other state and local laws that may impact alarm response.

*If two public safety responders are normally sent to every alarm call, multiply the above number by two to cover each officer.

Conclusion

It is very hard to measure what you can't count. It is also difficult to compare success and failure without standardization. We have recommended standards in compiling and processing alarm activity to help municipalities, alarm companies and alarm users more accurately understand the scope of how false alarm dispatches impact a jurisdiction. The standard collection of data by all municipalities will help in discerning whether or not an alarm management program is working and more accurately identify areas that need to be improved.

FARA
FALSE ALARM REDUCTION ASSOCIATION

False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency

Job Descriptions

Alarm Administrator

Classification: Lieutenant or Captain OR Civilian Equivalent

Salary Range: $26,300 to $83,091

I. Purpose

The purpose of this position is to develop and manage a successful, comprehensive program that reduces the number of false burglar and fire alarms to which Law Enforcement Officers (LEO) or Fire Fighters must respond each year, thereby providing the extra time needed to respond to true crime and fire calls for service, community policing efforts, fire prevention education and other public safety duties.

II. Main Duties

A. Program Development/Implementation

1. Develop and implement policies and procedures relating to enforcement of the alarm ordinance and pertinent regulations.
2. Develop, implement and manage new initiatives to combat false burglar and fire alarms.
3. Propose, draft and analyze legislation and executive regulations for effective enforcement, cost effectiveness and the impact on department policy, procedure and operations.
4. Evaluate effectiveness of alarm law and executive regulation and plan, draft, testify and implement amendments.
5. Establish program goals and objectives and ensure compliance and successful implementation.
6. Represent the City/County/Department in all matters relating to alarm management in meetings, forums, symposiums, etc., with public safety and the alarm industry nationwide, as well as with citizen groups, the legislature and the business community.
7. Serve as contract administrator for any third-party administration of the alarm program.
8. Initiate and direct planning projects and delivery of services by third-party private contractors to ensure that expansion of services is consistent with needs and priorities of program goals and objectives.
9. Develop and administer contracts, which includes preparation of requests for proposals (RFP's), advertising, reviewing bids and proposals, contract preparation and processing, administration of funds and oversight of contractor performance.

B. Legal Efforts

1. Prepare and deliver oral and written testimony before City/County/State legislative bodies.
2. Prepare cases and testify in court or before other regulatory bodies for issues such as denial of licenses (if applicable), collection of false alarm response fees/fines, placing buildings on a fire watch, suspending or revoking building Occupancy Permits and issuing civil citations or other collection efforts.
3. Represent County/City Executive and Fire or Police Chief/Sheriff at Public Hearings.
4. Provide technical direction on matters covered by law, questions related to alarm systems and their use/application/installation, compliance measures, citation procedures and other sanctions.

C. Technology

1. Coordinate all aspects of custom or off-the-shelf software used for an efficient alarm management program including the development, design, programming, testing, documenting, modifying, enhancing and maintenance of the automated information system.
2. Assess the effectiveness of technology used and conduct ongoing system review to establish long range goals, both with hardware as well as software.

D. Other

1. Select, train, supervise and conduct employee performance evaluations on professional and clerical employees.
2. Prepare annual reports, including extensive statistics, accomplishments and alarm management efforts for the County/City Executive and deliver oral reports to the County/City Council.
3. Prepare and monitor budget and make recommendations for staffing levels, cost recovery fees and major technology procurements.
4. Participate in interview panels for professional employees and high-level clerical personnel for divisions throughout the department.
5. Assist other jurisdictions with creation, enhancement, implementation and enforcement of alarm management ordinances.
6. Serve on local, state, regional and national alarm industry and public safety committees to provide a public safety perspective, advice and guidance and recommend initiatives/programs to reduce false alarms.

III. Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

1. Extensive knowledge of burglar and fire alarm systems, which provides the basis for developing and implementing program initiatives.
2. Extensive knowledge of the principles and techniques of planning, formulating, analyzing and implementing program policies and strategies, which provides for a successful alarm management program.

3. Thorough knowledge of federal, state and local laws and regulations pertaining to alarm systems, installers and companies, which provide the legal foundation for enforcement of alarm management efforts.
4. Thorough knowledge of federal, state and local laws and regulations pertaining to the administration and oversight of multi-faceted contracts of major scope, expenditure and effect.
5. Thorough knowledge of current developments in the alarm industry and alarm technology to keep abreast of ever-changing initiatives and uses/application of technology.
6. Thorough knowledge of the methods of statistical analysis, which enable the examination of data to apply resources, determine problematic areas, determine trends and provide the basis for new initiatives.
7. Skill in presenting information to public and private sector leaders to enhance understanding and compliance with laws and regulations.
8. Skill in evaluation and analysis of policy and procedures relating to alarm management to ensure a successful program.
9. Skill in evaluating statutes and enforcement efforts for effectiveness.
10. Ability to plan, effectively organize, train and supervise the activities of both professional and clerical personnel, as well as third-party contractors.
11. Ability to develop and maintain effective working relationships with command staff, the Executive and Legislative branches, alarm industry professionals and others interested in alarm management.
12. Ability to analyze, interpret and explain laws, regulations, policies and procedures to individuals, groups or agencies in order to gain compliance and/or understanding.
13. Ability to interpret statistical data to determine effectiveness of program and where further work needs to be done.
14. Ability to work independently and make decisions, which provides for the smooth operation of the office.
15. Ability to plan, both short and long term, the work of the unit.
16. Ability to prioritize work and multi-task.
17. Ability to review and analyze policies and procedures, to develop and implement new and/or revised procedures, to correct deficiencies or to make the program more effective.
18. Ability to deal courteously, tactfully and equitably with people, including the news media, which are essential skills in meeting demands and in coordination and administration of management program requirements.
19. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
20. Ability to attend meetings or perform other assignments at locations outside the office.
21. Ability to use and understand modern office automation systems.

IV. Complexity/Difficulty

1. The requirement to assess, interpret and evaluate policies, procedures and directions pertaining to all aspects of a specialized alarm management program. This requires a tremendous amount of knowledge of the alarm industry and alarm equipment, as well as the ability to develop, implement and manage a program that will affect the citizens of the City/County, the business community, law enforcement officers and fire fighters.
2. Maintaining confidential information on alarm users and dealing with the politically sensitive issue of denying response to citizens (if applicable). This is particularly difficult, as all citizens expect response when their alarm activates, but this position requires one to deny response (if applicable) and defend that action under certain circumstances.
3. Every action causes a reaction and weight must be given to how decisions will affect the citizens of the City/County, the business community, law enforcement personnel and fire fighters.
4. Developing new and untried approaches to reach program goals.
5. Keeping current with technological changes – both in alarm equipment and within an office environment. The ever-changing, fast-moving technological advancements can often times be mind numbing. A person in this position must be able to follow and understand how those emerging technologies affect the overall program and the ability to meet effectiveness goals and objectives.
6. Performing the management and implementation of the specialized program in an independent manner, under very general guidance requiring the development of concepts, theories, policies and procedures in an organized manner.
7. Understanding the difference between burglar and fire alarms, the expected public safety responses to each and how alarm management programs and policies may need to accommodate those differences.

V. Examples of Problems that Must be Regularly Resolved

1. Disputes from alarm users and alarm companies regarding fees/fines issued or program policies and procedures.
2. Personnel issues.
3. Procurement and allocation of resources – both staffing and equipment.
4. Computer hardware and software – determining the best course of action to obtain maximum benefits.
5. How to deal with or prevent conflicting state or local legislation.
6. Monitoring new initiatives from other City/County/State agencies that affect the alarm management program, such as the Law Enforcement Domestic Violence Initiative (if applicable).
7. Administration and oversight of contract provisions to ensure goals and objectives are met.
8. Negotiating collection payments or settlements based on established criteria.

VI. Challenges

1. Staying current with an ever-changing industry including changes in technology.
2. Ensuring that false alarms continue to be reduced, as failure to do so affects the deployment of other staff in the department.
3. Sensitive and political nature of denying response to the citizens of the city/county (if applicable).

VII. Examples of Decisions that Must be Regularly Made

1. Develop and implement new initiatives to reduce false alarms.
2. Personnel actions – selection, training, supervision, counseling, disciplinary action, employee performance evaluations, etc.
3. Response to alarm users – who is eligible for response and who is not (if applicable).
4. Establishing criteria and developing new policies and procedures for reducing false alarms.
5. Enforcement and compliance actions.
6. Goals and objectives.
7. Setting priorities.

VIII. Problems Referred to Supervisor

1. Broad policy decisions related to the direction of the program, commitment of resources and/or changes in policy affecting other agencies.
2. Broad direction on multi-jurisdictional issues impacting service delivery.
3. Serious personnel issues directly impacting employee tenure and progressive discipline.

IX. Minimum Qualifications

1. Graduation from an accredited college or university with a Bachelor's Degree and five (5) years of experience in planning, coordinating, directing, evaluating and modifying the activities of a government program, preferably dealing with alarms for at least one (1) year. (An equivalent combination of education and experience may be substituted.)
2. Certified Alarm Technician Status (preferred but not required).
3. Certified Alarm Manager Status (preferred but not required).
4. Demonstrated experience in writing ordinances and regulations.
5. Possession of a valid driver's license.

Alarm Enforcement Official

Classification: Corporal or Patrol Officer OR Civilian Equivalent

Salary: $20,000 - $70,148

I. Purpose

The primary purpose of this position is to handle implementation of the alarm management program, to ensure program goals and objectives are met, standard operating procedures are followed and ordinances are enforced to the fullest extent possible. This is full-performance, administrative, investigatory and compliance/enforcement work involving the implementation of the city/county alarm program, the related alarm legislation and any applicable regulations

II. Main Duties

A. Enforcement Efforts

1. Investigate and research violations of law and issue civil citations to alarm users and alarm business for those violations. Assist the City/County Attorney's Office in preparation of court cases to defend citations and testify in court.
2. Import all burglar and fire alarm calls for service and credit them to specific alarm user registration accounts, which directly impacts when and who incurs false alarm response fees/fines.
3. Research which alarm users are in violation of the alarm statute by virtue of non-compliance or non-payment and then suspend law enforcement response to those alarm users as a result of an alarm activation (if applicable) or take other enforcement actions as provided for fire violations, such as shutting the building down or suspending or revoking the building Occupancy Permit.
4. Oversee the production, generation and mailing of notices, invoices, inspection and upgrade certificates, delinquent invoices and licensing information (if applicable), which provides the basis for enforcement of the alarm statute, as well as the imposition and collection of false alarm response fees.
5. Work with county business owners and citizens to collect fees, monies and other debts owed to the City/County and to provide information concerning revenue collection procedures.
6. Work extensively with the City/County Attorney's Office or with third-party private collection agencies in the collection and documentation of delinquent fees owed and generated by the False Alarm Reduction Unit.
7. Collect, record and evaluate data and prepare statistical and narrative reports and other documents in support of the alarm management efforts of the law enforcement or fire department.
8. Review pending and passed legislation and evaluate for programmatic impact; make recommendations for amendments to current law as needed.

B. Customer Service

1. Provide technical data, guidance and assistance to management, alarm users, alarm businesses, state and local government staff and others interested in the reduction of false alarms.
2. Develop strategies for complaint resolution, analyze trends/patterns in false alarms and alarm usage city/countywide and recommend modification/enhancement of program policies and procedures.
3. Investigate, respond to and resolve inquiries, complaints and appeals regarding the false determination of alarm activations, both orally and in writing.

C. Implementation

1. Develop recommendations and assessments of alternative programmatic courses of action, as well as provide input on goals and objectives for program, needs and achievements.
2. Utilize data collection and analysis techniques to evaluate program; submit oral and written reports to management personnel for consideration and decision-making.
3. Serve as liaison between the law enforcement or fire departments and the public and private sectors.
4. Develop forms, educational materials and form letters.

D. Supervisory Controls

1. Supervision of the unit's clerical staff.
2. Participate in the preparation of the annual budget and contribute to the publication of annual reports.
3. Attend meetings and conferences and represent management as directed.
4. Establish work priorities and coordinate them to meet deadlines, which may be legally mandated or self-imposed, in order to assure an efficient workflow throughout the office.
5. Review and approve or reject alarm business license applications and plan, implement and manage the annual renewal process (if applicable).

III. Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

1. Extensive knowledge of the alarm management ordinance and any applicable regulations.
2. Extensive knowledge of burglar and fire alarm systems. For example, how they operate, numerous different components and types, what each component does and the best and most appropriate application for each.
3. Knowledge of statistical concepts and procedures.
4. Knowledge of generally accepted accounting practices and procedures.
5. Skill in leading assigned employees, providing instruction and reviewing their work.
6. Skill in explaining and defending issues and positions, both orally and in writing and in persuading individuals and groups to support false alarm reduction.

7. Ability to interpret laws, regulations, policies and procedures and to apply them in many different situations.
8. Ability to prepare comprehensive statistical reports.
9. Ability to handle confidential information with discretion.
10. Ability to arrive at sound decisions through detailed analysis and evaluation of information.
11. Ability to deal with people tactfully, effectively, equitably and with diplomacy.
12. Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.
13. Ability to attend meetings or perform work at locations outside the office.

IV. Complexity and Challenges

1. Placing alarm users in a denied response status, effectively precluding the alarm user from receiving law enforcement response (if applicable) to burglar alarm activations or to institute a fire watch or shut down a building, is particularly sensitive and complex. This action has far-reaching ramifications for the alarm user, the alarm business and the city/county. If done incorrectly, the City/County could be subject to legal action should an alarm user's location sustain actual criminal activity while in a suspended response status.
2. Involves a wide range of problems and issues that require independent action. Also requires the adaptation of program policies and procedures to meet situations not fully covered by guidelines and to develop and adopt creative solutions.
3. Independently analyze data, situations and conditions and develop appropriate course of action and solutions to problems or issues.
4. Handle irate individuals both in person and on the telephone. This is particularly difficult in that alarm users expect certain services from law enforcement and the fire department and can become hostile and abusive when those expectations are not fulfilled.
5. Challenging to balance many competing deadlines and multiple priorities.

V. Problems Regularly Resolved/Decisions Regularly Made

1. Determining who and when alarm users should be placed in a suspended response status (if applicable).
2. Determining if and when to place a location under a mandatory fire watch or take action to suspend or revoke a building Occupancy Permit.
3. Procedures for collection of false alarm response fees and the commensurate coordination with the City/County Attorney's Office or third-party private collection agency that is required.
4. Determining whether to grant or deny appeals that are filed by alarm users regarding the false determination of any burglar alarm activations.
5. Determining whether to grant or deny appeals regarding an order to disconnect or deactivate a fire alarm system or to revoke an occupancy permit.
6. The appropriate time and to whom civil citations should be issued.

VI. Problems Referred to Supervisor

1. False alarm appeals of a particularly unusual nature or situation.
2. Personnel issues.
3. Recommendations to deny the granting or renewal of an alarm business license (if applicable).

VII. Minimum Qualifications

1. Graduation from an accredited college or university with a Bachelor's Degree and two (2) years experience in progressive enforcement work. (An equivalent combination of education and experience may be substituted.)
2. Certified Alarm Technician Status (preferred but not required).
3. Certified Alarm Manager Status (preferred but not required).
4. Supervisory experience.

Alarm Inspector

Classification: Law Enforcement Officer/Fire Fighter OR Civilian Equivalent

Salary Range: $19,000 to $60,925

I. Purpose

The purpose of this position is to perform technical inspections of alarm systems in the field to ensure compliance with codes, ordinances and approved plans, permits and specifications.

II. Main Duties

1. Plan, manage and implement a schedule for inspecting alarm systems in the field, with particular attention to alarm users, who are experiencing problems.
2. Coordinate with other False Alarm Reduction Unit staff to ensure that problem alarm users are contacted and have their alarm systems inspected.
3. Inspect alarm systems at the alarm site, looking for problem installations; faulty, defective or malfunctioning alarm equipment; and/or unmaintained premises (loose doors and windows, etc.).
4. Work with alarm users and alarm businesses to ensure compliance with applicable electrical and other codes and ordinances.
5. Ensure that all proper permits were obtained to perform the installation work.
6. Conduct testing, investigate complaints and possible code violations and prepare written reports.
7. Educate and defend technical and procedural requirements to alarm users, alarm businesses and other interested parties through meetings and discussions conducted in the office or in the field.
8. Attend training exercises in order to maintain current knowledge of applicable codes, methods and practices.
9. Perform follow-up visits to ensure on-going compliance.
10. Prepare reports documenting inspections, investigations and enforcement actions; prepare and sign correspondence to all concerned parties; and establish compliance schedules based on the complexity of the repair work to be completed.
11. Issue civil citations to alarm users and/or alarm businesses for violation of the false alarm or code enforcement ordinances and defend that action in court.
12. Review and recommend changes in codes and regulations.
13. Suggest additional methods of crime and fire prevention to secure homes and businesses.

III. Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

1. Extensive knowledge of the principles of burglar and fire alarm systems, how they are designed and how they are installed.
2. Extensive knowledge of the various codes, ordinances and regulations governing the installation and maintenance of burglar and fire alarm systems.
3. Thorough knowledge of inspection, investigation and enforcement methods and techniques.
4. Thorough knowledge of improper trade practices, which may result in faulty, sub-standard or hazardous conditions.
5. Thorough knowledge of departmental policies and procedures as they relate to alarm management.
6. Ability to explain and interpret City/County electrical and alarm ordinances and regulations to alarm users and alarm businesses or their representatives.
7. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
8. Ability to analyze and interpret data gathered and prepare comprehensive reports.
9. Ability to conduct public meetings and to handle negotiations with tact, resourcefulness and good judgment.
10. Ability to work effectively under time constraints and conflicting priorities.
11. Ability to attend meetings and perform other assignments outside the office.
12. Ability to exercise good judgment and work independently.

IV. Complexity and Challenges

1. The variety of different codes, policies and procedures affecting the burglar and fire alarm industry, make this position both complex and challenging.
2. The adequacy and effectiveness of inspections and investigations affects City/County citizens, the business community, law enforcement officers and fire fighters.
3. Work is performed on site in residential and commercial properties where there can be hostile or aggressive behavior.

V. Problems Regularly Resolved/Decisions Regularly Made

1. Issuance of civil citations for violation of law.
2. Determine, on a case by case basis, the best course of action for an alarm user to take to resolve a problem burglar or fire alarm system.
3. Determine, on a case by case basis, whether a departure from conventional methods, procedures and policies would best serve the alarm user, the alarm business and the City/County, while maintaining compliance with all applicable ordinances and codes.
4. Sequencing and scheduling of work.

VI. Problems Referred to Supervisor

1. Unusual circumstances where there is no clear precedent.
2. Cases in which the alarm users and/or alarm businesses refuse to comply with recommended code enforcement requirements.

VII. Minimum Qualifications

1. Completion of High School and five (5) years of applicable experience in code enforcement/public safety, two (2) years of which must have been in field inspection and code enforcement work. (An equivalent combination of education and experience may be substituted.)
2. Training and attainment of Certified Alarm Technician status through an approved educational facility or course.
3. Training and attainment of NFPA certifications through an approved educational facility or course.
4. Possession of a valid driver's license.

Office Services Coordinator

Classification: Civilian Clerical

Salary Range: $13,500 to $55,480

I. Purpose

The purpose of this position is to provide advanced-level administrative support for the law enforcement or fire department's False Alarm Reduction Unit. This Unit is responsible for reducing the number of false alarms to which law enforcement officers and fire fighters respond, thereby creating more time for them to respond to true crime and fire calls for service, false alarm prevention education and other law enforcement and fire protection duties.

II. Main Duties

1. Respond to inquiries, both orally and in writing, from the general public, attorneys, other government agency personnel, alarm businesses and alarm users regarding the alarm management ordinance and the policies and procedures of the False Alarm Reduction Unit.
2. Use computers, with both custom and "off-the-shelf" software, to maintain and utilize the Unit's database, as well as certain Excel and Access databases, by registering alarm users, licensing alarm businesses and ensuring inspection or upgrade of alarm systems.
3. Reconcile financial statements using the city/county financial management software system, to ensure that all monies received and deposited by the False Alarm Reduction Unit are properly credited by the Finance Department.
4. Compile and prepare financial statistical reports for use in the budgetary process.
5. Prepare, send and maintain correspondence for the office by creating actual letters, reports, etc., proofreading final copy and distribution to appropriate parties, with attention to the quality and timeliness of the output.
6. Perform other related support duties, such as answering telephones, opening mail, greeting clients and scheduling appointments, as necessary.
7. Handle all ordering of supplies and/or equipment for the entire Unit and monitor the availability and usage of funds to ensure adequate funds exist to support the Unit.

III. Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

1. Knowledge of and the ability to become proficient in the false burglar and fire alarm issue, alarm equipment, professional associations and processes relative to alarm management.
2. Considerable knowledge of and the ability to apply the fundamentals of business English, spelling, grammar, punctuation and standard office practices and procedures.
3. Knowledge and the ability to become proficient regarding the provisions of the alarm ordinance and any related regulations.
4. Knowledge of City/County Government and law enforcement/fire department operations and procedures.
5. Ability to work independently on multiple and varied administrative tasks.
6. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
7. Ability to operate modern computer equipment with a variety of software, as well as other office automation equipment and systems.
8. Ability to exercise good judgement, courtesy and tact in responding to telephone callers and office visitors and making proper distribution of problems.
9. Ability to make decisions based on experience, good judgement and established policies and procedures.
10. Ability to work well under time sensitive and legally mandated time constraints.
11. Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with associates, supervisors, the general public, alarm businesses, finance department staff and the legislative and executive branches.
12. Ability to acquire a thorough knowledge of departmental rules, regulations, standard operating procedures and functions and to apply these to work problems.
13. Ability to perform mathematical computations, financial reconciliations and recordkeeping duties.
14. Ability to resolve office administrative problems quickly and efficiently.

IV. Complexity/Difficulty

1. Understanding and effectively communicating mandates of law and executive regulation, both orally and in writing. All information provided must be accurate and timely.
2. Must often deal with irate individuals, which makes it difficult to maintain a professional demeanor.
3. Multi-tasking is essential to this position. At any given time, there are multiple assignments that must be completed, which are mandated by law.
4. Independently and properly performed tasks negate the need for supervisory personnel to become involved in correcting mistakes and provide for the smooth, efficient operation of the organizational Unit.
5. The work product directly affects the accuracy, reliability and timeliness of the alarm management program and the services provided to responding officers and fire fighters and the general public.
6. Errors in maintaining the database could have severe legal implications for the city/county.

V. Examples of Problems that Must be Regularly Resolved/Challenges

1. Conflicting data.
2. Incorrect/insufficient revenue payments.
3. Financial data that does not reconcile.
4. Irate callers/visitors.
5. Automation difficulties that do not require a specialist.
6. Incorrect supply, equipment, printing orders.

VI. Examples of Decisions that Must be Regularly Made

1. Locating, selecting and applying the appropriate law, regulation, policy and procedure to a specific situation.
2. Sequence of work, obtaining necessary data or information and selecting appropriate methods and procedures to accomplish work.
3. Format and content of correspondence.
4. What information/materials to provide to alarm users and alarm businesses to ensure compliance with the law.
5. Filing system.

VII. Problems Referred to Supervisor

1. Questions of a non-routine nature.
2. Unit policy and procedure decisions.
3. Resource allocation issues.
4. Requests for new/upgraded equipment.

VIII. Minimum Qualifications

1. Completion of High School and four (4) years of administrative aide/secretarial/office support experience.
2. Successful completion of an accredited Business School preferred, but not required.

Receptionist

Classification: Civilian Clerical

Salary Range: $11,000 to $48,249

I. Purpose

The purpose of this position is to perform the majority of routine clerical duties within the False Alarm Reduction Unit, including but not limited to answering telephones, typing, filing, photocopying, faxing, receiving office visitors, scheduling meetings and opening mail.

II. Main Duties

1. Answer all telephone calls received in the False Alarm Reduction Unit, referring to other staff only those calls of an unusual nature.
2. Create and send all notification of false alarms, invoices, requests for remedial action, etc., to alarm users.
3. Type and send routine correspondence through the use of modern office automation equipment.
4. Maintain correspondence file by updating form letters and ensuring citizen correspondence is answered in an efficient and timely manner.
5. Maintain alarm business license files by ensuring updated information is included and collated.
6. Fill routine requests for materials by determining exactly what the caller or visitor needs and then distributing the appropriate materials.
7. Receive, review and distribute incoming mail and other materials.
8. Maintain alarm user permit/registration files, either on-line or in paper files, as appropriate.
9. Perform other related clerical duties as required, such as setting appointments, filing, etc.

III. Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

1. Extensive knowledge of and ability to apply fundamentals of business English, spelling, grammar, punctuation, arithmetic, standard office practices and procedures.
2. Extensive knowledge of the use of modern office automation equipment and standard office equipment, such as computers, photocopiers, fax machines, etc.
3. Knowledge of and ability to become proficient regarding the provisions of the alarm ordinance.
4. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
5. Ability to maintain office records and prepare reports from these records.
6. Ability to make decisions based on experience, good judgment and established policies and procedures.
7. Ability to set up and maintain filing systems.
8. Ability to exercise good judgment, courtesy and tact in receiving the general public.

IV. Complexity and Challenges

1. All information given to alarm users, alarm businesses, attorneys, executive and legislative branches of the government and the general public must be accurate to ensure compliance with the alarm ordinance.
2. All typed correspondence and materials sent must be correct and performed in a timely manner.
3. Confidentiality of alarm information must be maintained for the safety of the citizens of the City/County.
4. Must adhere to legally mandated deadlines.

V. Problems Regularly Resolved/Decisions Regularly Made

1. Office automation difficulties that do not require a specialist.
2. Format and content of routine correspondence.
3. Filing system.
4. Daily workflow with legally mandated guidelines.

VI. Problems Referred to Supervisor

1. Questions of a non-routine nature.
2. Unit policy and procedure decisions.

VII. Minimum Qualifications

Completion of High School and one (1) year of experience as an office support employee.

Data Entry Clerk

Classification: Civilian Clerical

Salary Range: $10,000 to $42,010

I. Purpose

The purpose of this position is to perform all data entry functions for commercial and residential burglar and fire alarm user registration forms and false alarm occurrences including, but not limited to entry and verification.

II. Main Duties

1. Input and verify data from commercial and residential alarm user registration forms.
2. Input and verify false alarm data received from the 9-1-1 center.
3. Update previously entered registration data using corrected registration forms and correspondence from alarm users and alarm businesses.
4. Update previously entered false alarm data with information provided by supervisory False Alarm Reduction Unit staff.
5. Validate all false alarm information before entering and correct those that are incorrect.
6. Data entry of payment for false alarms and fines.

III. Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

1. Knowledge of basic data entry and key verification principles and procedures.
2. Knowledge of and ability to learn basic aspects of the alarm management program.
3. Knowledge of and ability to learn appropriate department coding of false alarm incidents.
4. Ability to detect and correct erroneous keying.
5. Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships.
6. Ability to quickly and accurately input applicable data.
7. Ability to use and become proficient in various data entry computer equipment.

IV. Complexity and Challenges

1. Data must be entered or keyed accurately and in a timely manner. If not, invoices for false alarm fines/fees may not be generated and the city/county will lose revenues.
2. Errors could result in an invoice being sent to an alarm user, who does not owe any false alarm response fines/fees, or, conversely, invoices not being sent when required.

V. Problems Regularly Resolved/Decisions Regularly Made

1. Order of materials needed for data entry.
2. Automation difficulties that do not require a specialist.
3. Customer service issues over delinquent accounts.

VI. Problems Referred to Supervisor

1. Any problem that is not routine in nature or that cannot be resolved at the lowest level.

VII. Minimum Qualifications

1. Completion of High School and one (1) year experience in the operation of data entry devices.

False Alarm Reduction Program for
YOUR Agency

Additional Information on Software

The following pages go into greater detail on about your Alarm Management Software.

Put It In Writing

Your IT developers will need to understand your needs in order to develop cost and schedule estimates. Generally, this information is shared with potential developers through a Request for Proposal.

Start with a well-defined set of functional and system requirements. Understand, in detail, how you need/want to administer your program and assess proposals or existing software packages against those requirements. Think through how you will accomplish day-to-day tasks.

- If you collect money/payments, how will you interact with the local finance office to accurately and via audit ensure that the collected monies are accounted for in the local financial system?
- If you do not collect money, will money be collected through another government office (Treasurer, for example) or through a “lock box” system with a commercial financial institution?
- What types of information do you need on the invoice - Does the other agency or institution need any special information?
- How do you get information about payments; i.e., electronic data file, direct posting to the account, etc.
- How will you handle appeals of charged alarms; immediately remove fee charges for that alarm pending disposition of the appeal or make no changes until disposition?
- What information needs to go on a bill; previous amount due and alarms for this billing period or all alarms and fee status due or paid by alarm for a given time period?

This level of detail is necessary if you are to accurately assess the ability of a given software program to support your needs.

If possible, develop a series of test scenarios and related data and pre-test the software to match contractor claims against actual performance.

Off The Shelf Software or Custom Built Software

A major decision that needs to be addressed early on in the development process is whether to go with Off the Shelf software or Custom Built software.

Off the Shelf Software

Off the Shelf software packages offer faster implementation, pre-purchase trials and often some number of user-customizable features. These packages generally epitomize the "what you see is what you get" concept.

Advantages

- You can see what you are getting. You can preview the software and determine how it functions and how well it will support your program needs.
- Some limited amount of customization is available for a price.
- You can buy the software and get your program support up and running in relatively short order.
- You can talk to other users about their experiences with the software and their support from the contractor.
- Has been tried and tested and refined in actual use in numerous jurisdictions and will have very few undetected bugs.

Disadvantages

- If more than a limited amount of customization is needed, the costs will quickly approach the cost of a custom-built product.
- The program will generally have a fixed set of functions and methods of doing business.

- Must be compatible with your existing IT constraints.
- May install some form of code on your computer that has the potential to interfere with existing network or software.

Custom Built Software

Custom built products can be built using an outside software contractor under a commercial agreement or contract with or can be built by using in-house programmers and analysts. You basically start with a clean sheet of paper and work with the builder to design the system from the bottom up. Ask the contractor how you will be involved in the design and development process. You should be asked to spend a significant amount of time at the start in defining, in detail, your functional requirements and processes. The end result of these sessions should be a detailed functional requirements document that forms the basis for software acceptance. If the software works the way it is specified in the detailed functional requirements document, then you got what you asked for. If it doesn't work as described, make the contractor fix it until it does.

Advantages

- You can specify in great detail exactly what you want/need and can build the foundation so that additional features that you want, but can't currently afford, can be more easily added on later.

Disadvantages

- Are much more expensive.
- The time for "going live" with a custom program is greater.
- What you said you wanted - may not necessarily be what you need.

Examples of Custom Requirements: To distinguish between banks and other commercial establishments, or between different levels of government for ownership (local, state, federal, international). Importing Alarm Business licensing information from an existing local or state business license database.

False Alarm Ordinances, by the very nature of the local political process, include a significant amount of local flavor, either in how the ordinance will be enforced or how the fine schedule is established or in what constitutes a false alarm. For instance, in your jurisdiction, a false alarm is:

1) An alarm not disposed as valid or verified, or
2) Any non-weather alarm not disposed as valid, or
3) Any alarm to which a unit was dispatched and responded and not disposed as valid or weather related.

Another example is, in your jurisdiction, the false alarm fine/fee schedule is:

1) $100 for every false alarm – no "free," or
2) Escalating fees for every false alarm after the first two "free" ones, or
3) 0-3 false alarms = $0, 4-6 false alarms = $50, 7-10 false alarms = $100, 11+ = $250 each.

If the local flavor is not codified in the ordinance, it usually can be found in the implementing policies and procedures.

Before purchasing any software, make sure the software will meet the requirements of your ordinance and will allow you to easily change fees for permit renewals and false alarm dispatches if your jurisdiction changes the fee schedule.

In House or Outside Contractor

Who should do the building or the modifications? An outside contractor or internal IT support staff? Most off the shelf software includes contractor support. Custom software can use outside contractors or internal IT. This is a significant, and sometimes politically sensitive, consideration. Who should actually do the work?

In House

In general, if the local jurisdiction does internal software development, they should have the skills needed to build a system to help you manage your program.

One major issue is prioritization and assignment of resources. Another major issue is funding and payments. If the internal IT department does charge-back costing, they should be able to develop a reasonably accurate schedule and cost estimate for the project. The big issue you will face if the project goes "in-house" is lack of leverage; you may have no means or method of controlling the progress and resources applied to the task. If you decide to internal IT support, consider developing a contract between your office and the IT staff, similar to the contract you would sign between the jurisdiction and an outside contractor. This will assist in clarifying details such as proposed delivery schedules and post-delivery support.

Outside Contractor

If the development effort goes to a contractor, you do have some method of control through payment schedules and contractual penalties. Check on the past performance of the contractor with similar projects, as well as assessing their understanding of the project can help manage that particular risk.

Where is Your Program Located?

Web-Based Versus Client Server

There are two major types of modern applications; Web-based and traditional client server. The primary difference, from a user perspective, is how the users access the application. With a traditional client server application, the application itself or portions of it must be installed on each workstation that is used. If the application is not installed, you cannot start the application. This also means that any significant upgrades to the application may have to be installed on every workstation as well. If there are relatively few users and few locations where there are users, this is generally not much of an issue. However, if there are a large number of users, scattered over a large area, basic installation and maintenance may be a concern.

With a web-based application, the users access the information using a web browser, Internet Explorer, for example, and no application specific code is required on his or her workstation. Additionally, as long as the user has a browser, the underlying operating system (Windows/Mac/LINUX/UNIX) is not important. Web-based applications have the advantage of being installed in a central location, rather than on each individual system. This makes upgrades a quicker and simpler operation. With web-based applications, user system requirements are not as important. The speed of the application is not as closely tied to the performance capability of the user's system. Users can be anywhere, as long as the user can connect to the web server/site address hosting the application. Typically, these types of applications run on a local intranet and access is limited to a specific group of people and/or locations. Web-based applications provide much easier access for a large number of users; for example, if you already have computers with intra/internet access in patrol cars, the patrol officer could access alarm registration information through your application. There are some added complexities to administering web-based applications, particularly related to running the web server, maintaining the connectivity to the intranet/internet, and securing access to both the application and the data. If connectivity to the web server is lost, all users will be unable to access the application. Security is also an issue, especially if the application is accessible from the Internet as opposed to the intranet (your local organization's network). Special attention must be paid to safeguard the database server from hackers. Check with your internal IT department for more guidance in this area.

There are pros and cons to either web access or traditional client server applications. Following are some considerations you may want to explore when deciding which approach is best for your jurisdiction.

Web-Based Application

Advantages

- May be accessed from anywhere, provided the user has access to a computer with an appropriate browser.
- When modifications are made to the application, they only have to be made in one place, rather than on each individual desktop machine running the application.
- Easier access to the application when there are a large number of users, who are physically located in different sites or are mobile.

Disadvantages

- Firewall settings at some locations will/can block some web applications; i.e., java.
- Security concerns regarding data stored on servers with Internet access.
- Need two servers; one database server and a separate web server.
- Many useful database management tools, which are built into client server database managers, may be costly to implement in a web-based environment.

Client Server Application

Advantages

- More secure application.
- Database less exposed to attack.

- Client server database managers come with powerful and useful tools.

Disadvantages

- Portions of application must be loaded on each workstation that is used to run the application.
- Increased maintenance issues when modifications are made to the application.
- Harder to share.

Software as a Service in the Cloud

Some software vendors will license the use of their software on a yearly basis and host the application on the vendor's server.

Advantages

1) Vendor will provide the server and be responsible for maintaining the software.
2) Reduced up-front costs.

Disadvantages

1) Higher annual costs, as you will be paying for the hosting service in addition to the software license.
2) Potential for increased system response times.
3) Potential for security breaches, as you are not in control of the server and access to the server.
4) May be difficult to migrate your data on alarm sites and dispatches to another system if you are dissatisfied with the service.

Internal IT

Often internal IT departments have developed IT standards that allow the IT department to provide better overall support to the jurisdiction. These standards can range from desktop PC operating systems to Microsoft Windows, UNIX variants or backend server systems and databases. These limitations can affect what software can be used.

Where Is Your Data Located?

Your software may be designed to store the data (names, addresses, alarm activity, etc) in one or more places:

- On the local hard drive of the system user
- On the network server
- In the Cloud - at the software vendors server or at a vendor contracted to store data

Know where your data is stored and make sure adequate safeguards are in place to protect and save it.

Security Considerations

Security should be considered throughout the process of choosing your software. You should have an awareness of how your alarm management software will be impacted or will impact the security of other computer systems in use by your agency.

You should identify if the other systems that may share hardware, communications networks and/or operating systems with your new alarm management software have the appropriate protection from hackers and viruses to serve your needs. You should determine if these existing network and Internet security measures, antivirus software and firewalls will provide your alarm management program with adequate protection. And, you should inquire of your prospective alarm management software designers and your internal IT departments if your software might cause issues for the other programs in use by your agency.

You may also want to make it clear that additional security protections are needed if a jurisdiction wants to give the public web access to their alarm data. The public should not be able to directly access the database, which contains mission critical data secured behind the agency's firewall. The public will need to access a copy of the database, which is stored in front of the firewall, and then a set of secured programs will need to be developed to migrate updates between the two databases. Be very careful about what data elements you allow the public to update. For example, if your ordinance does not allow for the transfer of permits from one location to another, your system should not allow updates to the street address.

Options and Upgrades

Level of Detail

One primary cost driver is the amount of information you need or want to capture about users, alarm businesses, incidents, bills, payments, etc. There is a minimal level of information everyone needs; name, address, and phone number for a user registration for example. However, there is a wide range of useful information that can be very helpful, or even critical, to your program beyond this minimal level.

Most jurisdictions will also need the capability to capture a separate billing address for some of their alarm sites. It can be helpful to include site-specific comments (large aggressive dog in yard) along with the registration. Many jurisdictions will want to associate a site with at least the monitoring company that serves the site.

Tip: The needed level of detail should be determined before you begin assessing different options and solutions so that you know up front if a particular software package can support your needs or will need to be "enhanced". The level of detail required should be captured in your detailed functional requirements document. Think this area through carefully. It will be more expensive to go back and add data elements to the program and supporting database once the software is built than to include it in the initial development.

How Data is Stored

Information can be captured in many ways, some of which are more useful than others. For example, a site address can be captured as a single entry of street number, street name, street type, city, state, and zip code. A better, more generally accepted method is to capture each data element separately. This allows use of pull down lists for specific pieces of the address and allows for more efficient searching for parts of an address, for example, searching for all the registered users on a particular street.

Two-way CAD Interface

With a one-way CAD interface, you get incident information electronically from the CAD. The two-way CAD interface means that you not only get information *from* CAD, but that you also give information *to* CAD. This two-way interface becomes a critical function if your jurisdiction denies police response based on failure to register, excessive false alarms, non-payment, etc. It will be the Alarm Unit's responsibility to "flag" accounts that should not receive police response, and to then electronically transfer this information to the CAD system.

Example of Two-way CAD Interface: You could feed the CAD system registration and often alarm business information that can be included on the call takers screen and in the data sent back to you. This can greatly reduce the amount of time spent in matching alarm incidents to specific users and can assist you in getting internal acceptance of your program by providing useful information to the responding officers, such as contact phone numbers, site alerts that the alarm company may or may not pass to the call taker.

While this "upgrade" may be useful, it can be expensive, both in terms of cost and schedule. This type of enhancement generally also requires modifications to the CAD system, which you may be asked to fund, depending on your jurisdiction. It also requires the active support of the CAD supervisor, or it will never make the schedule for CAD improvements. The remaining roadblock is the CAD contractor, which may or may not be willing to make the needed changes to the program.

Billing Notice Generation

There are a number of ways to generate bills. You can feed data to an external system like your local finance office, you can send the information to an outsourcing company, you can use an external program and generate the bills outside of the false alarm system or you can require that the false alarm system generate the bills as part of its core functionality. Some ways are cheaper than others, and some are much better at supporting the overall program requirements. For example, if you send data to another unit for bill generation, you really don't know what will show up on the bill, thus have a harder time providing answers to customer inquiries about their bill. The preferred solution is to have the false alarm software program generate the bill. You must ensure that the bill generation software is compatible with your IT standards, if the bills are generated using report writing or word processing add-ins like Crystal Reports or Word. A disadvantage is that you may find yourself stuck, after several years, with an outdated program because of incompatibilities between versions of the same program over time.

Number/Type of Reports

The more reports you want the longer it will take to deliver the software. All software should offer some "standard" management reports; i.e. user lists, business lists, collection totals over time, etc. Make sure you understand what reports are available in any software. Ask how the contractor will handle requests for additional standard reports. Note: A "standard" report is a report that is frequently or regularly required as opposed to a report that might be

needed to answer a specific inquiry from the local governing body or for a specific, non-recurring task. The later type of reports is considered "ad-hoc" reports.

Ad-hoc Reporting Capability

While standard reports can greatly assist you in managing your program, there will always be the need to collect information to answer "one-time" questions and for "what about" inquiries. It is possible to build into your software an "ad-hoc" query generator, which would allow users to build their own queries for reports. This capability can be expensive and may not be all encompassing. Many contractors will use a standard reporting add-in, like Crystal Reports, in generating your "standard" reports. You should ask about the availability of support from the contractor in developing queries to support ad-hoc reporting. This may be covered in your annual maintenance agreement, if you have one, or support may be available on a pre-determined rate basis. You should also check on how the contractor proposes to add additional reports to the list of available standard reports.

System Administration

As with the above functions, there is a minimum level of system administration capability that must be included in any software package. However, this function can be expanded to include database table maintenance and even "rule" maintenance, if needed.

You may want, or need, the ability to add/delete/change the database lookup reference tables for things like clearance codes, street types, street names, and fee structures through the false alarm program software user interface. These tables can always be modified through the database management interface, but this requires some familiarity with the database management software and the data manipulation language associated with the database.

Maintenance and Updates

The range of support provided under maintenance agreements can be very broad. Make sure you understand and detail in your contract what you are getting in a maintenance agreement. At a minimum, ensure you know what "routine" maintenance the contractor recommends (daily database backups, file maintenance, etc.) and who will perform these tasks (might need to involve your internal IT department). Specify the procedures for identifying problems you may encounter in the program and methods of resolution. Agree on the definition of a "bug" and a "modification", and how each will be handled. Generally, if the software functions (doesn't crash) and the results are as specified in the functional requirements, any change request will be considered an enhancement request by the contractor. If the results are wrong, again based on the specifications in the functional requirements document, then it should be considered a bug. Another area for negotiation is program and technology upgrades. For example, the current software may run on the current version of Windows, but may not run on the next generation of the Windows operating system. If your standard IT architecture changes to the next generation of Windows, will the contractor support that platform? If the contractor develops a new release that does work on the next generation of Windows, is it offered at no cost as part of the maintenance agreement, or is there an upgrade cost? If your department is not using a Windows desktop platform, make sure that the software will run on whatever operating system you are using. Similarly, make sure you understand what happens if the server software or backend database management systems change. These updates may be proposed by the software provider as part of an enhancement or may be dictated by your internal IT department. These issues are all subject to negotiation and will affect the overall system cost.

Often there can be significant yearly maintenance fees associated with software. If there are, make sure you understand what the maintenance fee covers. Some contractors will include periodic maintenance releases and bug fixes, problems where the software is clearly not working as specified; for example, system crashes or calculates 5 for 2+2. Others may not. In general, the annual maintenance fee does not cover enhancements, or additional functions or changes to support a new program requirement. If possible, negotiate an hourly rate for enhancement work. If regular maintenance releases, such as a technology upgrade in the report engine, are included in the annual fee, you should develop a test strategy for testing the maintenance release in your specific environment prior to putting the release into production, just to make sure that it runs correctly in your environment prior to potentially corrupting your data.

False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency

Software Vendor Questionnaire

False Alarm Tracking and Billing Systems form the basis of your alarm management program and may be the single most expensive, but mission critical, element of your program. The more automation you have, the fewer people it will take to implement and manage your program. Therefore, it is critical that your false alarm tracking and billing system meet all of your needs, current and future. Do you know what you need? Do you know what to ask for? Are you computer literate or do you have an IT Department to help you?

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with questions that will allow you to fully explore the features and costs of each software program that you consider. The questions are those that your fellow ordinance managers identified based on their experiences in purchasing and using alarm management tracking and billing software. You are encouraged to add additional questions that will be necessary to serve the needs of your department or unit. For example, when reviewing alarm management software, be sure that the system will accommodate all of the mandates of your specific alarm ordinance. If your ordinance requires that you calculate false alarms based on a certain criteria; i.e., rolling calendar, annual basis, one year from latest false alarm, etc., be sure that the software program you are looking at will calculate false alarms as directed by your alarm ordinance. If you identify additional issues or questions that are helpful to you, we would welcome hearing from you so that we can address them in future revisions of this document.

Software Company Questions	Company #1	Company #2	Company #3
Name of Software Company			
General Software Requirements			
1. Does the software have the ability to handle the 'business rules' of your jurisdiction?			
2. Does the software have an alarm business licensing component?			
3. Does the system have an archiving component, which allows for the archival of old data or records?			
4. Does the system allow user defined access restrictions by function?			
5. Does the system automatically check data as it is being entered and provide warnings for detectable errors such as unreasonable dates, which improves data integrity?			
6. Does the system have an intuitive look and feel that is easy to learn and use, which utilizes standard Windows conventions and features?			
7. Can the system generate bulk e-mails to alarm owners?			
8. Does the system provide "drop down" or "pick lists" to save data entry time and reduce data entry errors?			
9. Can users easily customize the "drop down" lists without additional vendor costs?			
10. Does the system integrate all features into a single system without the need for additional word processing, spreadsheet and accounting packages?			

11. Does the software provide for data capture using separate text fields for items such as first name, last name, street number, street name, street type, etc. to facilitate better sorting?			
General Financial Requirements			
1. Will the software calculate the proper alarm charge per alarm count?			
2. Will the software allow for multiple alarm fee structures as needed?			
3. Does the system set the proper registration fees and renewal fees? If needed, will the system allow for different renewal fees based on the number of false alarm dispatches in the past renewal period?			
4. Will the system automatically calculate and bill late fees, if needed?			
5. Does the software distinguish between false robbery and burglary calls for proper billing, if needed?			
6. Does the system track appeals and revise charges based on results of an appeal?			
7. Does the system have the capability to waive false alarm charges in lieu of the alarm user attending alarm user awareness school?			
General System Functions			
1. Does the program allow for categorizing (i.e. school, bank, church)?			
2. Will the system, either automatically or by user initiated action, change status levels at appropriate times? (active, inactive, suspended, etc.)			
3. If your ordinance contains inspection requirements, will the system automatically notify the user/alarm company?			
4. Does the system automatically generate permit numbers and/or can the end user key in specific permit numbers?			
5. Can the program search for a check number?			
6. What other "search" methods/fields are available?			
7. Does the system link alarm users with their applicable alarm installing and monitoring companies?			
8. Will the system perform statistical analysis based on these links?			
9. If the system accepts electronic transfer of permit data, from whom and in what format is the data transferred?			
10. Does the software have an alarm user permit module that allows manual data entry, as well as electronic transfer of complete alarm user data?			
11. Does the software allow users/alarm companies to make changes to specific data in their own records via the Internet?			
Invoice			
1. Does the program show proper invoice amount and payment(s) received before detailing current charges?			
2. Can an account history be included?			
3. How often does the system allow invoices to be prepared and printed?			
4. Can the end-user modify the invoice (header, return address, local seal, etc)?			
5. Can the end user customize a letter and/or envelope to be electronically created and sent with each invoice?			
6. Is there a payment stub on the invoice, which can be returned with the payment?			

7. Does the invoice contain all of the information you want? If not, is it customizable by the end user?			
8. Can the system accommodate bar codes and/or Scantron capabilities?			
9. Does the system have the ability to invoice two different addresses for the same false alarm? (parent/child, landlord/tenant, corporate/local)			
10. Does the invoice component handle electronic funds transfers and/or escrow accounts, if used?			
11. Can the invoice include individual or global messages?			
12. Does the system maintain a log of notice and invoice creation?			
Payment Entry			
1. Can the program track and print payment information?			
2. Does the program provide an audit trail?			
3. Does the audit trail track user, date, and time of all entries? (These should be system generated and not modifiable.)			
4. Does the system apply payments first to the oldest amounts due or is there an "alarm for alarm" payment calculation made? (Balance forward or open item.)			
5. Does the system accommodate partial payments?			
6. Does the system provide for electronic funds transfers (EFT) such as from a lock box?			
7. Does the system accept and track all methods of payment; i.e., cash, check, money order, credit card, EFT, etc?			
8. Can the system differentiate between different types of payments made; i.e., registration fees, renewal fees, false alarm fines/fees, civil citations, appeal fees?			
9. Is there a place to enter check or money order numbers?			
10. Is there a place to enter the name of the person or entity making the payment?			
11. Can the system handle write offs (uncollectible monies)?			
12. Does the system provide Holding Accounts or other methods to account for advance and over payments?			
13. Does the application process credit card transactions? If so, can you provide certification that the application meets PCI DSS requirements?			
14. What data related to credit card payments is stored by the application?			
15. Does the system allow for on-line payments from alarm users/alarm companies?			
CAD Interface **(It is important to determine what interface methods are acceptable to your CAD administrator prior to proceeding.)**			
1. Is an electronic interface with your CAD/RMS an integral part of the software?			
2. Does the program electronically extract data from your CAD/RMS, if needed?			
3. Does the program read data extracted from your CAD/RMS, if needed?			
4. Has this vendor already worked with any other jurisdiction that uses your CAD?			
5. Is the CAD interface one or two way? (upload and download)			

6. Does the CAD system have the ability to store alarm user and alarm company data for retrieval?			
7. Is dispatch tied to an alarm company's ability to give the alarm user's permit number?			
8. Does that data then populate a CAD operator's screen to facilitate dispatch?			
9. Will alarm data extracted from CAD/RMS automatically populate user accounts on Alarm Management Unit side?			
10. Is that automatic population tied to any matching criteria? If so, is the criteria user defined or modifiable?			
11. What will happen to alarm records that do not meet all matching criteria? Will they sit in a "pending" cue? Will they be lost?			
12. Is the CAD/RMS interface "real time" as events occur or for some other specified time period?			
13. Does the system automatically generate a record on the CAD side to indicate when a premise has been suspended and the length of the suspension? If so, is this record automatically modified if an appeal is granted, reinstatement fee is submitted, suspension period has passed, or any other qualifying criteria has been met?			
Database Requirements			
1. Which database(s) does the program use?			
2. Is the database compatible with the computer programs used by your department?			
3. Does your IT department support that database?			
4. Are there size restrictions in the database?			
5. Will the database allow for the growth of your program; i.e., alarm users and alarm businesses?			
6. Will the system accept electronic transfer of data from alarm companies?			
7. In what formats can it be accepted?			
8. How does the application/database provide protection for sensitive personal data of alarm users and companies (SSN or other personal identification number, home phone numbers, etc.)?			
9. What security measures does the application/database include to prevent/limit unauthorized access, particularly if the application is web enabled?			
Permits			
1. Does the software print notices and permits?			
2. Can users customize any information on the permit?			
3. Does the program have word processing capabilities?			
4. Can histories and/or summary statements be included when the permit is prepared?			
5. Can the program show the expiration date on invoice for permit renewals?			
6. Does the system recognize duplicate addresses?			
7. Does the system create consecutive permit numbers or are they entered manually or both?			
8. Does the system accept electronic transfer of alarm user permit data from alarm companies, either in batch form or by individual alarm user?			
9. Does the system have the capability to issue permit numbers both individually and in batches when requested?			

Reports			
1. Does the program provide reports that are needed for your unit; such as daily, monthly, quarterly and annual listing and totaling permit, permit renewals, dispatch and all other payments received?			
2. Are the reports customizable by the end user?			
3. Can reports be created tracking all desired data, such as registrations, alarm companies, false alarms, false alarm rates, delinquent accounts, audit and financial, etc?			
4. Can other report writers be used with the database?			
5. Does the program provide only their report style and is anything else an enhancement or modification?			
6. What happens if I identify additional reports I may need?			
7. Can data on a report be sorted by any field I choose?			
8. Does the system automatically track unpaid invoices, generate statements, and provide an Aged Accounts Receivable report?			
9. Does the system use a "balance forward" or "open item" method to track unpaid fees? Is either method preferable or required by your jurisdiction? (Balance Forward requires one to audit invoices and payments back to day zero to determine the outstanding balance. Open Item applies payments directly to the individual renewals and false alarm dispatches.)			
10. Does the system track and generate necessary reports and letters for expired permits that have not been renewed?			
11. Can reports be created electronically to allow them to be emailed to appropriate parties?			
Notices/Letters			
1. Does the system provide any prewritten notices and/or letters?			
2. If so, are they customizable?			
3. If not, can I create my own letters? Will this require vendor customization or can I do it myself?			
4. How many different notices/letters will the system handle?			
5. Will the system print out specific letters with attachments, such as an invoice or inspection certificate at the same time? Or, will I have to collate the letters with the invoices (or other attachments) off-line?			
6. Can I recreate any letters I have already sent to alarm users/alarm businesses?			
7. Does the system track and record the specific letters/notices that have been sent, along with the date of creation?			
Hardware/Networking			
1. Will the software run on my existing hardware? If not, what type of hardware is required?			
2. What are the storage parameters necessary to hold expected data for one year? Five years? Ten years?			
3. Will the software run on my existing operating system? If not, what type of operating system is required?			
4. Will the software run on my existing network? If not, what type of hardware is required?			
5. Is the system designed to print on my existing printers? If not, what type of printer is required or what is the cost of custom drivers to adapt to my printers, if any?			

6. Will the system support my current method of backing up data or is a method included in the system?			
7. Will the system run on the same computer with other applications (word processing, etc.) or is a separate system required or recommended?			
8. Is the system compatible and protected by my existing antivirus software? If not, what steps are required?			
9. Where is the database(s) housed? (Unit, Department, or Municipal servers?)			
10. Is there redundancy built in for back-up and fail over purposes or is that the responsibility of the end user?			
Implementation			
1. What does the vendor require of my department to implement the system?			
2. What is the average amount of person hours that departments similar to mine have had to devote to getting the system running?			
3. How long will it be from the time I sign the contract to when we are up and running?			
4. What procedures and features does the vendor have in place to simplify the conversion of existing data and the collection of new data?			
5. How long will it take once conversion of data begins to when we can fully utilize the system?			
6. How does the vendor train my staff on the system?			
7. What is the average amount of person hours that departments similar to mine have had to devote to becoming fully trained on the system?			
8. What types of instruction manuals are provided?			
Maintenance			
1. What tasks are required and how frequently must they be performed to maintain the system?			
2. Who is responsible for those tasks?			
3. How long do these tasks take on a weekly basis?			
4. What is covered in the maintenance contract?			
5. What is excluded from the maintenance contract?			
6. How many upgrades or patches were issued in the last year on this program or on a preceding program, if this particular product has been in use less than one year?			
7. How are the upgrades and/or patches installed?			
8. Is the system required to be removed from service while the patches are installed?			
9. Are upgrades and patches provided to existing customers free of charge? If not, what is the fee?			
End-User Software Customization Does the program allow end users to set properties to customize features, or must a program change be made such as:			
1. Change false alarm fee structures (how many and for how much?)			
2. Change registration and/or renewal fees			
3. Change body of letters			
4. Change permit forms			

5. Change time periods			
6. Modify items in the drop down list			
Vendor Customization (if needed)			
1. Is the vendor willing to customize to meet your needs?			
2. Do the modifications cost additional funds? If so, are the fees calculated on a time and materials basis or a flat fee based on the functionality requested?			
3. How long will customization require?			
4. Will the vendor provide cost estimates for different functionality requests?			
Vendor Support			
1. Is there an annual license(s) fee for the software?			
2. What is the cost for annual license(s)?			
3. What is the cost for annual upkeep and maintenance of the program?			
4. How is support provided? Telephone support? Website support? On-site?			
5. What are the different costs associated with each type of support?			
6. Do I automatically get new versions of the software or do I have to pay extra for the updates?			
Company Information			
1. How long has the company sold this software?			
2. How many customers use the software?			
3. Will they supply a list of current customers?			
4. Is there a local company representative?			
5. If not local, where are they located?			
6. Will the vendor submit to criminal history background checks prior to signing a contract for any employees, who will be working on-site during the project or who have access to confidential information?			
7. Will the software vendor provide a detailed demo of the software before purchase?			
8. How long has the company been in the software development business?			
Overall Cost			
1. What is the cost of the base software product without enhancements or modifications?			
2. What are known “add-on” costs; i.e., modules that may be available, but that will only be provided for an extra fee?			
3. Is the software product cost based on a per PC basis or is the product sold for a specific amount regardless of how many PC’s on which it is installed?			
4. If sold on a per PC basis, how many PC’s need to be configured?			
5. What is the cost per PC?			
6. Is there a ‘view only/limited use’ version?			
7. What is the cost per PC for ‘view only/limited use’ version?			
8. Who owns the software? (i.e., do I own the product or do I purchase a license to use the software?)			

9. What is the total cost of new or upgraded hardware to support the software?			
10. What is the total cost of converting and loading data from an existing system into the new system?			
11. How many total hours will be required of my staff to implement the system?			
12. What is the term and annual cost of any maintenance contracts offered or required for the system?			

Summary

The contents of this questionnaire may seem overwhelming at first, particularly if you are new to an alarm unit or have never helped to develop or purchase software before. It is for that very reason that FARA has compiled this questionnaire to help you understand the scope of your purchase/lease and to help you and/or your IT Department understand what is possible. The questionnaire provides you with space to record the answers to your questions so you can compare several different companies and software products. Asking each the same question will help keep you on track and provide a means to compare "apples to apples."

There are a huge number of options available for the asking. The most important thing to consider, from a macro level, is whether the system will accommodate the mandates of your alarm ordinance, business processes and rules. If it does not accommodate all, does it handle the majority, and is that acceptable to you and your jurisdiction? If the answer is no, then keep looking.

Do not be afraid to question anything and everything! Remember, this is a mission critical decision you are making, so be sure you understand all the varied tasks each software package provides, as well as any limitations they may have. You may only have one chance to "get it right," so make sure you are using all the resources you have available to make the best decision possible. This is one of the most critical and costly decisions you will make in implementing your false alarm program. It is important to take extra time and consideration and educate yourself before you buy.

FARA
FALSE ALARM REDUCTION ASSOCIATION

False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency

Universal Alarm Permit Form

City/County or Police Dept. Seal

CITY/COUNTY Of ( )

ALARM USER PERMIT/REGISTRATION

Street Address, Phone Number, Fax Number

Web Site Address

Permit/ Registration No.

A NON-REFUNDABLE $_____ PERMIT/REGISTRATION FEE MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH EACH PERMIT/REGISTRATION FORM. MAKE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO _____.

A. Residential Alarm User Information: (Residential alarm users, please complete Sections A and C through G.)

Alarm User Name: _____ _____

First Name Last Name

Alarm Location: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Street Number Street Prefix Street Name Street Suffix Suite/Apt. No.

_____ _____ _____ _____

City State Zip Code Gate Code

(____)_____ (____)_____ (____)_____ _____

Home Phone Work Phone Cell Phone or Pager Email Address

B. Commercial Alarm User Information: (Commercial alarm users, please complete Sections B through G.)

_____

Name of Corporation, Sole Proprietor or Partners

_____

Trade Name(s) Used by Business

Alarm Location: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Street Number Street Prefix Street Name Street Suffix Suite/Apt. No.

_____ _____ _____ (____)_____

City State Zip Code Business Phone Number

Owner or President of Business: _____ _____

First Name Last Name

(____)_____ (____)_____ (____)_____ _____

Home Phone Work Phone Cell Phone or Pager Email Address

Local Manager: _____

_____

First Name Last Name

(____)_____ (____)_____ (____)_____ _____

Home Phone Work Phone Cell Phone or Pager Email Address

C. Mailing Address: (If different from Location of Alarm System)

_____

D. Contact Information: (List two people, other than the owner, who can respond to an alarm activation.)

1st Contact Name: _____ _____

First Name Last Name

(____)_____ (____)_____ (____)_____ _____

Home Phone Work Phone Cell Phone or Pager Email Address

2nd Contact Name: _____ _____

First Name Last Name

(____)_____ (____)_____ (____)_____ _____

Home Phone Work Phone Cell Phone or Pager Email Address

E. Alarm Install/Service Company: _____

License No. _____ **Contact Person:** _____ **Phone** (____)_____

F. Alarm Monitoring Company: _____

License No. _____ Contact Person: _____ Phone (____)_____

G. Special Conditions: (List hazardous conditions/materials, guard dogs, security personnel, weapons, directions to alarm site, etc.)

_____

I have read the completed application and know the same is true and correct and hereby agree that if a permit is issued, I will comply with all the provisions of the (city/county name) Code and with applicable State Laws. I accept responsibility for payment of all fines and fees that may result from the operation of the alarm system serving the above premise. I have read the information on (city/county) False Alarm Reduction Program. Permit/registration of an alarm system is not intended to, nor will it, create a contract, duty or obligation, either expressed or implied, of response. Any and all liability and consequential damage resulting from the failure to respond to a notification is hereby disclaimed and governmental immunity as provided by law is retained. By permitting/registering an alarm system, the alarm user acknowledges that police response may be based on factors such as availability of police units, priority of calls, weather conditions, traffic conditions, emergency situations and staffing levels.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

DIRECTIVE RELATED TO:

CALEA STANDARD REF.:

FOR DEPARTMENT USE ONLY

CK#_____

MO#_____

FET#

Instructions for Completion of Alarm User Permit/Registration Form

Section A – To be completed by Residential alarm users only

Alarm User Name: First and last name of the residential alarm user. List both spouses, if applicable.

Alarm Location: Complete street address, including directional prefix and suffix, where the alarm is located. Indicate the home, work and cell or pager (cell is preferable) numbers of the alarm user, as well as one email address where the alarm user can receive correspondence. If no email address is available, leave blank.

Section B – To be completed by Commercial alarm users only

First Line: Indicate the full legal corporate name of the business. If the business is a sole proprietorship or partnership, list the name of the owner or one partner.

Second Line: List any trade names used by the business if different from the corporation name, owner or partner's name.

Alarm Location: Complete street address, including directional prefix and suffix, where the alarm is located. Indicate the business phone number at the alarmed location.

Owner or President: List the first and last name of the president, owner or person responsible on a corporate level for the alarm system at the alarm address. Indicate the home, work and cell or pager (cell is preferable) numbers of the business owner, president or partner, as well as one email address where this person can receive correspondence. If no email address is available, leave blank.

Local Manager: List the first and last name, home, work and cell or pager (cell is preferable) numbers and email address for the local manager at the alarm site.

Section C – To be completed by both Residential and Commercial alarm users

Mailing Address: Indicate separate mailing address if different from the alarm location.

Section D – To be completed by both Residential and Commercial alarm users

Contact Information: These are persons, who should be contacted in the event of an alarm activation, and who are willing and have agreed to receive notification of an alarm activation at any time, respond to the alarm site within (specify time limit), grant access to the alarm site and deactivate the alarm system if such becomes necessary. Two separate contact persons are required. Provide home, work and cell or pager (cell is preferable) numbers, as well as email addresses of contacts.

Section E – To be completed by both Residential and Commercial alarm users

Alarm Install/Service Company: List the name of the company that either installed or services your alarm system. Include the alarm company's license number, contact person and the best phone number at which to reach this individual. Check your contract or contact your alarm company for the information.

Section F – To be completed by both Residential and Commercial alarm users

Alarm Monitoring Company: List the name, license number, contact person and phone number of the company that monitors your alarm system and requests public safety dispatch on your behalf. If same as install or service company, leave blank.

Section G – To be completed by both Residential and Commercial alarm users

Special Conditions: Indicate any unusual circumstances that should be considered when responding to an alarm at the permitted alarm address such as: handicapped person(s), guard dog on site, hazardous conditions/materials, security personnel, weapons, directions to alarm site, etc.

Signature Line: A responsible residential alarm user or the president, owner, partner or local manager of a commercial alarm user must sign this form.

Electronic Filing Information

FILE FORMAT FROM ALARM BUSINESSES

Order	COLUMN NAME	DATATYPE	LENGTH	FORMAT/VALUES/REMARKS
1	TRANSACTION TYPE	char	1	N(ew), U(pdate), D(elete), T(ransfer)
2	REGISTRATION_NO	char	9	
3	LOC_STREET_NUMBER	char	10	Alarm Site Location
4	LOC_DIR_PREFIX	char	2	
5	LOC_STREET_NAME	char	30	
6	LOC_DIR_SUFFIX	char	2	
7	LOC_APT_SUITE_RM_NO	char	15	
8	LOC_CITY	char	30	
9	LOC_STATE	char	2	
10	LOC_ZIP	char	10	
11	GATE_CODE	char	10	
12	OWNER_FIRST_NAME	char	30	
13	OWNER_LAST_NAME	char	30	
14	OWNER_HOME_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
15	OWNER_WORK_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
16	OWNER_CELL_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
17	OWNER EMAIL	char	40	
18	BUS_NAME	char	60	
19	BUS_TRADE_NAME	char	60	
20	BUS_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
21	MANAGER_FIRST_NAME	char	30	
22	MANAGER_LAST_NAME	char	30	
23	MANAGER_HOME_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
24	MANAGER_WORK_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
25	MANAGER_CELL_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
26	MANAGER_EMAIL	char	40	

27	MAIL_ADDRESS1	char	40	
28	MAIL_CITY	char	30	
29	MAIL_STATE	char	2	
30	MAIL_ZIPCODE	char	10	99999-9999
31	CONTACT1_FIRST_NAME	char	30	
32	CONTACT1_LAST_NAME	char	30	
33	CONTACT1_HOME_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
34	CONTACT1_WORK_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
35	CONTACT1_CELL_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
36	CONTACT1_EMAIL	char	40	
37	CONTACT2_FIRST_NAME	char	30	
38	CONTACT2_LAST_NAME	char	30	
39	CONTACT2_HOME_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
40	CONTACT2_WORK_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
41	CONTACT2_CELL_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
42	CONTACT2_EMAIL	char	40	
43	INSTALL_CO_LICENSE_NO	char	5	
44	INSTALL_CO_NAME	char	60	
45	INSTALL_CO_CONTACT	char	45	
46	INSTALL_CO_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
47	INSTALL_CO_ACCOUNT_NO	char	10	
48	MON_CO_LICENSE_NO	char	5	
49	MON_CO_NAME	char	60	
50	MON_CO_CONTACT	char	45	
51	MON_CO_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
52	MON_CO_ACCOUNT_NO	char	10	
53	SPECIAL_CONDITIONS	char	60	
54	BURGLARY ALARM	char	1	Y(es), N(o)
55	PANIC ALARM	char	1	Y(es), N(o)
56	HOLD-UP/ROBBERY ALARM	char	1	Y(es), N(o)
57	RESERVED-FIRE ALARM	char	1	Y(es), N(o)

APPENDIX C

FILE FORMAT FROM JURISDICTIONS

Order	COLUMN NAME	DATATYPE	LENGTH	FORMAT/VALUES/REMARKS
1	TRANSACTION TYPE	char	1	N(ew), U(pdate), D(elete), T(ransfer)
2	REGISTRATION_NO	char	9	
3	LOC_STREET_NUMBER	char	10	Alarm site location
4	LOC_DIR_PREFIX	char	2	
5	LOC_STREET_NAME	char	30	
6	LOC_DIR_SUFFIX	char	2	
7	LOC_APT_SUITE_RM_NO	char	15	
8	LOC_CITY	char	30	
9	LOC_STATE	char	2	
10	LOC_ZIPCODE	char	10	99999-9999
11	GATE_CODE	char	10	
12	SPECIAL_CONDITIONS	char	60	
13	OWNER_FIRST_NAME	char	30	
14	OWNER_LAST_NAME	char	30	
15	OWNER_HOME_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
16	OWNER_WORK_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
17	OWNER_CELL_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
18	OWNER_EMAIL	char	40	
19	BUS_NAME	char	60	
20	BUS_TRADE_NAME	char	60	
21	BUS_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
22	MANAGER_FIRST_NAME	char	30	
23	MANAGER_LAST_NAME	char	30	
24	MANAGER_HOME_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
25	MANAGER_WORK_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
26	MANAGER_CELL_PHONE	char	13	(999)999-9999
27	MANAGER_EMAIL	char	40	
28	MAIL_ADDRESS1	char	40	
29	MAIL_CITY	char	30	
30	MAIL_STATE	char	2	
31	MAIL_ZIPCODE	char	10	

32	REGISTRATION_STATUS	char	1	A(ctive), I(nactive), S(uspended)
33	EXPIRATION_DATE	char	8	YYYYMMDD
34	DENY_RESPONSE	char	1	N(o), Y(es)
35	AB_LICENSE_NO	char	10	
36	AB_ACCOUNT_CODE	char	10	

APPENDIX D

FILE FORMAT – TIME SENSITIVE CHANGES FROM JURISDICTION

Order	COLUMN NAME	DATATYPE	LENGTH	FORMAT/VALUES/REMARKS
1	TRANSACTION TYPE	char	1	U(pdate)
2	REGISTRATION_NO	char	9	
3	REGISTRATION_STATUS	char	1	A(ctive), I(nactive), S(uspended)
4	EXPIRATION_DATE	char	8	YYYYMMDD
5	DENY_RESPONSE	char	1	N(o), Y(es)
6	AB_LICENSE_NO	char	10	
7	AB_ACCOUNT_CODE	char	10	