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Public Safety False Alarm Reduction Professionals

False Alarm Reduction Program
for YOUR Agency

Produced by the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA)

FARA	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
	Table Of Contents

- Work with the Public
- Work with the Industry
- Work with Public Safety
- Provide Training
- Website

Chapter 10   Enforce YOUR Program

Chapter 11   Evaluation & Reporting

- Evaluate the Effectiveness of YOUR Program
- Review and Adjust YOUR Program
- How to Create the Most Effective Annual Report
- What Do You Do With the Report When It Is Done

Chapter 12   Conclusion

FARA	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
	Chapter 1
	Overview

One of the most difficult tasks municipalities and public safety face is how to:

- reduce false alarms
- relieve the drain on resources, both in terms of dollars spent and work-hours wasted
- and address the very real safety issues created by false alarm responses

The answer is to create a False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Locality.

The success of multiple localities throughout North America proves that implementing a program can reduce calls for service to free up valuable time to devote to:

- crime prevention and community policing initiatives
- patrolling neighborhoods
- responding to actual fires and criminal activity
-

In order to create, implement or refine a false alarm prevention program it is helpful to be aware of the causes, impact of false alarms and the solutions to reduce them.

Major Causes of False Alarms

- **User Error** - Everything from failing to properly secure the doors/windows before setting the alarm to forgetting the passcode to disarm the system or trying to "beat the clock" when exiting can activate an alarm. Cooking the popcorn too long will create enough smoke to trip any smoke alarm.

  - **Lack of User Training** - One of the main reasons for user error is lack of good, comprehensive training on how to use the system, what to do if the system activates and how to cancel a false alarm, should one occur. Alarm users must constantly be re-educated on the proper use of their alarm systems and this responsibility falls directly on the alarm company. Also, a plan of attack must be developed to train new employees and visitors.

- **Improper Design** - An alarm system must be designed with the alarm user's lifestyle/business environment in mind. If there are pets that have free run or even limited run of the alarm user's home, did the salesperson sell, and did the technician install, interior motion detectors? Did you assume that cats can only jump so high? If so, it is a false alarm waiting to happen.

  - **Lack of Maintenance** - Lack of maintenance covers both alarm system maintenance, as well as physical site maintenance. If you move into a new house and after six months to a year you notice that your doors start to stick, or your windows no longer open and shut as they should, it is probably due to settlement that has occurred. This should be repaired immediately, as it may cause false alarms. If windows and doors are not tight in their frames, the contacts may become separated or out of alignment, which can signal an alarm activation. Also, alarm systems should be inspected on an annual basis by a licensed or certified alarm technician to ensure the system and all components of the system are operating properly.

- **Wear and Tear** - Just like any electronic component, alarm systems wear out and must be serviced on a regular basis. Would you expect to never change the oil in your car and not eventually have engine trouble? The same thing holds true with alarm systems and alarm users must properly maintain their systems to ensure proper operation. Detectors need to be cleaned.

- **Extreme Weather** - Extreme weather causes a huge number of false alarms, and for the most part, it should not. An alarm system should not activate just because there is a thunderstorm (unless the panel receives a direct hit by lightning) or because it happens to be a windy day. Yet, we all have stories about how we tracked a thunderstorm by where alarms were going off. If at all possible, do not excuse false alarms due to weather. Alarm systems should be designed and installed, and alarm users should maintain their facilities appropriately, so that false alarms do not occur during most weather events.

- **Power Failure** - Power failures, as well as surges, occur on a fairly frequent basis. They should not, however, be the cause of a false alarm. If the power goes out for any reason, the alarm system's battery backup should kick in and avoid a false alarm. Most backup batteries last for a minimum of four hours and some jurisdictions even have a time frame built into their ordinance mandating how long the backup battery must last.

- **Unsecured Pets** - A family pet moving throughout the home may be large enough to activate a motion sensor. Special sensors are available to adapt to some pets. Problems occur with new pets or as pets grow over time.

- **Objects Inside An Alarm Location** - Hanging or moving signs or decorations will activate motion detectors, especially when heating or air conditioning systems come on or gusts of wind are strong enough to move them.

FARA has created numerous false alarm bulletins designed for alarm users, which outline various causes of false alarms and how to avoid them. These bulletins are available on-line at www.faraonline.org.

Major Impacts of False Alarms

The biggest problem with home and business security systems is the number and frequency of false alarms. There are costs associated with false alarms for several categories.

Costs to Public Safety

- **Billions of dollars in wasted resources and wasted manpower and time** - False alarms cost police, fire and EMS billions of dollars every year in wasted time, manpower and money driving our cars and trucks all over our jurisdictions responding to non-crimes, non-fires, non-emergencies.

- **Complacency** - False alarms cause officer safety issues. Responding to the same location over and over again and not finding any criminal activity lends itself to officer complacency, where they may not be prepared for the "real thing" when it happens. This is when officers, and others, can get hurt or worse.

- **Not available for actual calls** - Officers who respond to false alarms are not available for community outreach or response to real crimes, medical emergencies or fires.

LOUISIANA DEPUTY KILLED RESPONDING TO ALARM
Posted by Law Officer
Apr 30, 2017 | Officer Down |
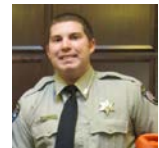
Costs to Alarm Industry

- **Staff at central stations to answer calls** - Increased level of activity, whether they are false alarms or not, means more staff at the central stations to answer the calls.

- **Technicians to respond to troubleshoot** - Capable, trained alarm technicians are required to visit their alarm sites to troubleshoot the cause of the false alarm.

- **Customer service staff to deal with alarm users** - Customer service staff to handle questions and problems with the alarm user and to re-educate them on the proper use of their alarm systems is required.
- **Increased training costs -** There may be increased training costs for alarm companies to educate their employees on how to deal with false alarms.
- **Time -** Trying to determine the cause of false alarms, educating the customer and fixing problems can take a significant amount of time - time that is now not available to sell new systems, sign up new customers and grow the company.
- **Fines -** Finally, many jurisdictions assess fees or fines for excessive false alarms. Those fees or fines can either be passed on to your company by the alarm user or may even be assessed directly to you by the authority having jurisdiction.

Costs to Alarm Users

- **Imposition of fees/fines** - Alarms users are faced with paying false alarm response fees/fines imposed by local jurisdictions, which may range from $25 to as much as $4000 per false alarm.
- **Maintenance costs** - Maintenance agreements or higher maintenance costs are required to troubleshoot and repair any equipment false alarm related problems.
- **Monitoring fees** - Monitoring fees may increase based on the volume of calls their central station has to handle.
- **Time and Aggravation** - Users have to deal with the time and aggravation involved in understanding why they had false alarms and to correct the problem. This could mean time away from work to wait for service technicians, as well as listening to their neighbors complain about how their alarm went off again.

Costs to Public at Large

The public at large also bears costs associated with false alarms, when they themselves may not even have an alarm system.

- **Officers not available when you need them** - If officers are responding to what turns out to be a false alarm, they may not be available to respond to real criminal activity, which puts citizens at greater risk.
- **Subsidizing those with alarm systems** - The huge costs to public safety to respond to false alarms can be borne by the entire community through higher taxes, etc.
- **Increased risk of car crashes** - When officers do respond to alarm signals with lights and sirens, which some still do, there is an increased risk to the general public on the highways.
- **Annoyance factor** - There is the annoyance factor – having to listen to your neighbor's alarm siren going off all hours of the day and night.

Prime Solutions to False Alarms

- **Proper Design** - The design of an alarm system is key to an alarm user being comfortable with using it. It must fit the environment in which it is being installed. Both the alarm seller and the installer must know about any environmental issues that may cause false alarms and must ensure that the system will not false due to these concerns. Pets, children, and domestic help,

as well as the general weather conditions of the area, are all pieces to the puzzle that must be taken into account when designing an alarm system.

- **Quality Equipment and Proper Installation** - The proper installation of quality equipment will also go a long way towards reducing the likelihood of false alarms. The quality of equipment has improved greatly over the years, and may no longer be a main cause of false alarms. However, it is a factor with older systems that are still in use. Quality equipment does not necessarily mean the most expensive either. It is also important that alarm equipment be installed properly and according to manufacturer's specifications. You could have the best equipment in the world, but it will cause false alarms if is not installed properly.

- **Alarm User Education** - Effective initial training of all alarm users within the location on the proper operation of the system could be the single most important factor in false alarm prevention. It is essential that all users of the alarm system be present when the training on an alarm system occurs. The alarm system trainer should provide plenty of time for instruction in layman's terms and allow the users to play with the system while the trainer is there. The more comfortable the alarm users are with their system, the less likely they will be to cause false alarms. On-going training for alarm users on what causes false alarms and how to avoid them is a must.

- **Waiting Period** - Some jurisdictions have enacted "waiting" or "soak" periods in their ordinances, which prohibit alarm companies from requesting dispatch for a short period of time after installation of an alarm system. This gives the alarm users a chance to get used to their systems and make mistakes, before it costs public safety and the user any money.

- **Verify Before Dispatch** - Most alarm ordinances in effect today require some type of verification of an alarm signal prior to requesting public safety dispatch. Verification may include a single telephone call to the premises, a second call to a different phone number (known as enhanced call verification), voice verification and video verification. These verification techniques are proven to reduce false alarms when used prior to public safety dispatch.

- **Follow-up on Every False Alarm** - The alarm company should follow up with their alarm user any time the user has a false alarm. A simple call to find out the cause provides an opportunity for re-education and discussion of the seriousness of false alarms to all concerned. Some public safety agencies have also taken on the responsibility of contacting their citizens when false alarms occur to discuss the circumstances of the activation and ways to prevent false alarms in the future.

- **Regular Maintenance** - Both the alarm system and the physical site need regular maintenance. Doors and windows need to be checked. Also, alarm systems should be inspected annually by a licensed or certified alarm technician to ensure the system and all components of the system, especially the batteries, are operating properly.

- **Communication** - Alarm users should review their call list with their alarm company at least once a year, and notify them of any changes when they happen.

	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
FARA	
	Chapter 3

Define YOUR Problem

Before any meaningful discussions on false alarm reduction can take place, a municipality must be able to define its false alarm problem. You can't regulate what you can't count. CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) systems have report features that can be customized to provide specific data on false alarms. Discuss with your CAD vendor or CAD administrator the types of reports you need to help quantify your false alarm problem.

- How many different commercial and residential alarm calls did public safety respond to?
- Of those responses, how many were to the same address or to different addresses?
- What percentage of your total calls for service are for alarm activations?
- What is the average time spent by public safety personnel in response to an alarm activation, beginning with the initial request for dispatch up until clearing the scene?
- How many officers are sent to each request for dispatch to an alarm activation?
- Using a clearance code or other qualifier, can you determine how many alarm calls were false alarms?
- Using an intake code, can you determine how many requests for dispatch were for alarm activations and then how many of those were cleared as false, or as something other than an alarm call.
- Were there any public safety personnel or citizens injured or killed as a result of a false alarm?

Try to keep separate commercial and residential statistics. Legislators are often more willing to regulate the business community than they are to regulate homeowners. By keeping statistics separate, you can show if real problems exist more in one group than another or if residential problems exist to an extent that would require residential alarm users to be regulated as well.

Keep in mind that the total number of different addresses to which public safety responded for alarm activations does not constitute the entire universe of alarm users. Some alarm users may not have false alarms.

If you register or permit alarm users you can get a better idea of how many users you have. If you are not registering users you can reach out to alarm companies to see if they can tell you how many customers they have in your jurisdiction.

If you are not able to find out the total users by registrations or polling the alarm companies, you can use the national average to get an estimate. On average, approximately 20% of all alarm users cause 80% of the false alarm problem. Therefore, be sure to calculate what your alarm user base might be given the 20/80% formula.

Here are some things to look for in the statistics:

- How many alarm users cause problems for public safety
- How many false alarms have occurred within a specific period of time
- The costs in time and work-hours wasted for both officers and 9-1-1 center personnel
- Whether or not there were any injuries or deaths as a result of false alarms.
- The loss of available patrol time
- How false alarms impact your ability to respond to other emergency calls for service.

These statistics, shown in graphs, pie charts, etc., can be an effective, graphic display of the scope of your municipality's false alarm problem and will be the basis for all of your false alarm reduction efforts.

	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
	Chapter 4
	Build Support

Obtain Support from Police Chief/Sheriff/Fire Chief

Discuss the false alarm issue with your police chief, fire chief, and/or sheriff. Show the statistics and graphs you have developed that illustrate not only the costs commensurate with false alarms, but the possible cost savings that are achievable. Let him/her know that there are effective programs currently in use in other parts of the country and that you are not wading in uncharted waters. Be sure to convey your seriousness and dedication to seeing the program through to fruition. It will be important to your chief/sheriff to know that the false alarm program you are proposing will not become one which he/she will have to pick up, or let stall, because you are not willing to see it through to the end. Therefore, if you cannot finish it, find someone else who can.

Let your chief/sheriff know that your false alarm reduction program will be a cooperative effort among public safety, legislators, alarm industry, and citizens groups. Also, get commitment from your chief/sheriff that all groups within public safety will work cooperatively to get the job done. With a comprehensive package, you will need support from your 9-1-1 centers, patrol officers, supervisors, and support staff. You will also need support from your municipality's finance office, attorney's office, and appeals board.

Obtain Support from Legislators

Once you have your public safety hierarchy on board, you can then start on the legislators. It would be useful to have at least one legislator, who can sponsor a false alarm reduction ordinance. Go to the legislator who most often sides with public safety issues, and one who has proven to be able to carry votes among the local legislative body. Again, using your statistics and graphs, get the legislator to first buy into the need for false alarm legislation, and second, to be a part of the working group that will develop the program.

Obtain Support from Industry

Public safety and the alarm industry often believe they must have an adversarial relationship. This could not be farther from the truth. FARA has developed an excellent working relationship with the alarm industry leaders and their national associations, whose mission it is to represent, support and promote the electronic security systems and life safety services industry. Most in the alarm industry are as concerned about false alarms as public safety.

It would be a huge mistake to exclude the alarm industry from your effort, as the industry has the unique ability to say to your legislators, "False alarms are a recognized problem and we want to work *with* you not *against* you to solve it." Alarm industry leaders, who are dedicated to false alarm prevention/reduction, also have the unique ability to talk with alarm dealers in your area with the advice that they either buy into the program or look for work elsewhere when the municipalities decide that public safety will no longer respond to alarm activations.

If you do not know any alarm industry leaders, please contact FARA. We can put you in touch with someone in your area who is willing to help you create and implement an effective false alarm reduction program.

Obtain Community Support

You might also wish to involve your local Chambers of Commerce, Neighborhood Watch groups, and Community Associations. The bottom line is the more people you have, who support your false alarm reduction efforts, and the more people, who actually have ownership of the final product, the better your chances are for success.

Form a False Alarm Reduction Working Group

It is extremely important to create a working group that will further your goal of false alarm reduction. The group should include public safety, legislator(s), alarm industry professionals and alarm users. Pick your working group carefully, as group members will be the very people who will garner the cooperation you need to get your program in place.

FARA	**False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency**
	Chapter 5
	Develop YOUR Program

Set Timelines

Don't set yourself up to fail! Give yourself approximately 18 months to develop your false alarm ordinance and get it through your legislature, hire staff, develop policies and procedures for your unit, create registration/permit forms and other mailings, and design/purchase false alarm tracking and billing software. Even using the information and materials contained in this manual, it will still take a significant amount of time to implement your program. Be up front with everyone about the effort involved and time commitments needed to ensure success, especially with the elected officials, who may want a "quick fix." Once your program is up and running, the "fix" will be in place, but it takes time to get to this point.

Define Your Objectives

When pressed for an immediate solution to the alarm management issue, the temptation may be to go for expediency. However, experience has shown that it pays to spend some time identifying the long term goals for an alarm reduction management program.

Common goals include:

- Significant reduction of the impact on patrol resources.
- Improve the morale and safety of the responding officer.
- Cost recovery.
- Minimize the impact on responsible users.
- Minimize the administrative burden on the locality and department.
- Where needed, change the behavior of the alarm company and its personnel.
- Where needed, change the behavior of the alarm user.
- Continued effectiveness of responsibly used alarm systems.

Select Your Strategies

In researching this issue, it is apparent that there are as many different approaches to the problem as there are jurisdictions.

Twenty strategies that are commonly used throughout North America for reducing false alarms have been identified. No inference should be drawn from the order in which the options are listed.

The most successful alarm management programs have combined several of these strategies to form a local program. Each municipality must select the proper combination of these strategies to achieve the desired impact.

Decide which of the following strategies you want to use in your program. This will allow you to complete the rest of your program.

1. Enforce Existing Ordinance
2. Permitting or Registration
3. Registration Fees
4. False Alarm Fees or Fines
5. Restricted Response

6. Enhanced Call Verification (ECV)
7. Other Monitoring Center Verification
8. Education
9. Alarm User Awareness Schools
10. Public safety Outreach
11. Private or Verified Response
12. Billing Alarm Companies for Fees and Fines
13. Alarm Management Outsourcing
14. Broadcast and File
15. Alarm Business Licensing
16. Installation/Manufacturing Standards
17. Criminal Sanctions
18. Acclimation Period
19. Publish Alarm Company Dispatch Rates
20. Cancelled Dispatch Requests

Please read further to discover more details about each option along with some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

1. Enforce Existing Ordinance

Many localities have an existing ordinance, that could provide the necessary tools to reduce false alarms, but which may not be enforced. Perhaps what is needed for a successful alarm management program is the proper commitment of staff and resources to implement and enforce the existing ordinance. Or, modifying the existing ordinance with minor amendments may serve a jurisdiction's needs.

Advantages

- Allows the jurisdiction to begin managing false alarms without waiting to complete the sometimes lengthy process of adopting or amending an ordinance.
- Allows for the positive communications with alarm companies and users as to why now is the time to start enforcing the ordinance. By communicating before enforcement, "ownership" can be perceived by many of the effected parties.
- Positive reflection of Authorities to general public by NOT passing new laws.

Disadvantages

- May be more difficult to revise an insufficient ordinance than to start from scratch with a new ordinance.

2. Permitting or Registration

Most localities require permitting or registration of all alarm users. Registration periods vary from one time only to one or more years in length. Some registrations are free while others involve a fee. Alarm companies are often required to inform the alarm user of the requirement. Alarm companies are often enlisted or may even be required to distribute registration forms to the end user.

Advantages

- Allows the jurisdiction to create meaningful statistics on the number of alarm users, how many have false alarms and how many have excessive false alarms.
- Provides a mechanism to quantify and evaluate the false alarm reduction effort.
- Provides a way to focus the end user's attention on the problems associated with false alarms.

Disadvantages

- Requires a manual or computerized process to obtain and track the registrations.
- Lists of alarm users can be subject to Freedom of Information Act requests depending on your own individual state law.

3.   Registration Fees

Many jurisdictions charge a nominal fee for registration to help defray processing costs. Others charge a registration fee designed to partially offset a portion of the response costs as well.

Advantages

- Permit/renewal fees can be used to pay for administrative costs.
- Can provide the seed money needed for start-up, so a municipality will not have to front any revenue for the program. For example, if it is estimated that an alarm user base is 30,000 and that is multiplied by a nominal fee of $10.00 per registration, it will provide $300,000 to use for start-up costs.
- In order for something to have meaning, it must have a value. If registration is free, it may be perceived that there is no value to alarm users, and it may be very difficult to get them to register their alarm systems, to understand the importance of avoiding false alarms and to use their systems responsibly.

Disadvantages

- Requires a manual or computerized process to obtain and track the fees.
- Fee can encounter citizen and political resistance.
- Failure to enforce without clearly defined and enforced sanctions for the violation will penalize those trying to comply while rewarding the abusers.

4.   False Alarm Fees or Fines

Some localities impose fees or fines for excessive false alarms. The point when fees are levied varies; escalating fees seem to have a greater impact on the reduction of false alarms. Consult the FARA Model Alarm Ordinance for more information.

Advantages

- Provides an incentive to the alarm user to operate the system properly.
- Provides an incentive to the alarm user to ensure that all those who use the alarm system receive adequate training to avoid false alarms.
- Could recover administrative and response costs for the municipality.

Disadvantages

- Alarm users may budget for fees and avoid changing their behavior if fees are not set at significant amounts.
- Requires a manual or computerized process to obtain and track the fees.
- Fee can encounter citizen and political resistance.

5.   Restricted Response
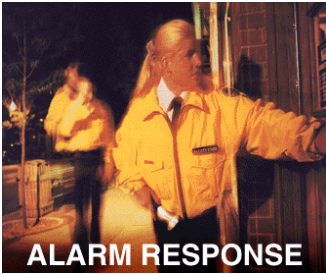
Some jurisdictions may deny public safety response to alarm activations for various reasons. Some ordinances provide for non-response after a certain specified number of false alarms within a given period of time, for failure to obtain a permit or registration, failure to remit false alarm response fees/fines, or for other violations of the ordinance. Procedures are established for reinstatement of response prior to duration of the suspension period. Municipality should have a form signed by alarm users that show they are aware of this policy. Administration of this policy must include written notice before suspension, which provides alarm users with their due process rights.

Advantages

- Provides a means to encourage a behavior change in the alarm user or to obtain compliance with the ordinance.
- Provides one way to deal with the user who has "budgeted" for their false alarm fines.
- Since a significant amount of patrol resources goes into responding to the same repeat offenders (schools, shopping centers, etc.), suspension of response to these problem users will have a significant impact on response requests.
- If alarm users know that they will not receive response if they fail to register their alarm system, the vast majority of alarm users will comply.
- Likewise, if alarm users know they will not receive response if they fail to pay a false alarm response fee, the majority will pay what is owed.

Disadvantages

- Requires a manual or computerized process to track the number of alarms, send the notices, etc.
- Suspension of response can encounter citizen, alarm company, and political resistance.
- Possibility of litigation and subsequent financial penalties to the locality if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss.

6.   Enhanced Call Verification (ECV)

With single call verification, the alarm company calls the alarm site after the burglar alarm is received but before public safety dispatch is requested. If the user answers, indicates an error, and verifies his/her identity, no dispatch is requested.

Enhanced Call Verification requires that an additional call be made to another responsible party or owner at a different telephone number when the first call does not succeed. Often the second call is placed to a cell phone number and is normally made in cases where there is a busy signal, no answer to the first call, or an answering machine is reached. This method has proven extremely effective in reducing false alarm dispatch requests.

Advantages

- ECV is a nationally recognized American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standard titled, Alarm Verification and Notification Procedures / CSAA-CS-V-01
- Can result in significant reduction of dispatch requests.
- Can be implemented via policy or through an ordinance.
- Requires no public safety time or resources.

Disadvantages

- Can delay the time between activation and a request for dispatch.

7.   Other Monitoring Center Verification

An alarm company should be encouraged or required (via the ordinance) to attempt to verify each burglar alarm signal prior to requesting public safety dispatch to determine if there is a real need for response.

Several methods exist to perform verification including;

- Telephone Verification- the alarm company calls the alarm site immediately after the alarm is received but before public safety dispatch is requested. If the user answers, indicates an error, and verifies his/her identity, no dispatch is requested.
- Two Way Voice- Use of a two-way voice communications system to listen in or converse with users at the alarm site.
- Video Verification- Use of a remotely monitored video camera to observe the alarm site.

Whatever form of verification is required or will be accepted by the jurisdiction, it must be clearly defined in your ordinance. There is one generally recognized exception to the verification requirement. The exception is for manually activated silent duress, panic, or hold-up alarms. Most public safety agencies make some distinction between manually activated alarms and regular burglar alarm activations. In the case of duress/hold-up alarm activations, either no verification is required, or verification is required only after public safety has been dispatched.

Advantages
- Public safety will be required to respond to fewer false alarms by requiring alarm companies to filter out those alarm signals known to be false.

Disadvantages
- Video verification can result in an increased cost to the alarm user.

8.   Education

An important component of any false alarm reduction program is education of alarm users, alarm companies, monitoring services, and responders. Each should be encouraged to accept their responsibility for proper system use and installation and the reduction of false alarms.

Classes or meetings may be held with businesses, alarm associations, and neighborhood groups, as well as one-on-one with alarm users and their alarm company. Meetings may cover use of equipment, design and system false alarm problems, and the cost of false alarms to tax payers. The training may also include information on the effects of false alarms on public safety, and discussion of officer safety issues.

Advantages
- Provides the alarm user, the alarm company and the responder with a firm foundation for avoiding false alarms.
- Is consistent with "community policing" programs putting department personnel in the community helping alarm users to solve a problem.

Disadvantages
- Requires public safety time and resources.

9. Alarm User Awareness Schools

Many municipalities offer problem alarm users the option to attend an Alarm Awareness School. The premise is the same as Traffic Schools that are required when a driver receives a certain number of points on his/her driving record. The Alarm Awareness School gives the municipality the opportunity to meet face-to-face with alarm users who are experiencing problems with false alarms. It provides a mechanism to educate the alarm user on the dangers of false alarms, as well as the considerable waste of public safety resources.

Some successful alarm awareness schools include the alarm industry as instructors at the school. Alarm industry representatives can teach alarm users how to correctly use their alarm systems, what types of equipment are most false alarm resistant and what types are the most likely to false, and can demonstrate the proper ways to set and deactivate an alarm system, among other things. By including the alarm industry, the alarm user understands that the industry and public safety are equally concerned about false alarms and each are taking a proactive step to deal with the issue.

Attendance at classroom or on-line alarm awareness schools can be required, optional or both, depending on the provisions included in an ordinance, and should provide some incentive to the alarm user to attend. Most municipalities provide a certificate for waiving one false alarm fee if the alarm user attends the school.

Advantages

- The recidivism rate among alarm users who attend an alarm awareness school is extremely low.
- Provides the alarm user with a firm foundation for avoiding false alarms.
- Is consistent with "community policing" programs putting department personnel in the community helping alarm users to solve a problem.
- Can show a good return on the time and resources invested.

Disadvantages

- Requires public safety time and resources.

10. Public Safety Outreach

Several jurisdictions have had success with required or voluntary meetings facilitated by public safety with the alarm user and the alarm company to identify and solve an alarm problem. Others have had success by scheduling follow-up visits by patrol or alarm unit officers to problem sites. Still others have found it effective to assign officers to the alarm unit who receive technical training and inspect problem systems in order to suggest or require changes. Success has also been achieved with follow-up phone calls from the alarm unit to problem sites.

Advantages

- Is consistent with "community policing" programs putting department personnel in the community helping alarm users and alarm companies to solve a problem.
- Can have a significant impact on the reduction of false alarms for targeted alarm users.

Disadvantages

- Requires public safety time and resources.

11. Private or Verified Response

The verified response method requires an independent eyewitness verification that a criminal act either is occurring or has occurred prior to requesting public safety dispatch. This method usually applies only to burglar alarms and exempts human activated alarms such as hold-up, duress and panic from the verification process. Some jurisdictions continue to have alarm units that assess fines/fees for those false human activated alarms to which public safety continues to respond.
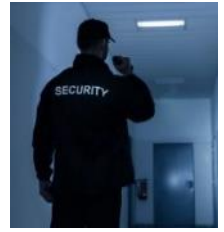
Generally, the alarm company subcontracts with a private guard company to provide the initial response when an alarm activates. Instead of contacting the local public safety authority when the alarm system activates, the monitoring company will contact the local responder requesting response. Upon verification that criminal activity either is occurring or has occurred at the alarm site, public safety response is requested.

A few states have established requirements for alarm responders. Many states have some type of licensing and regulation of security guards, which includes the level of training which must be obtained prior to acting in the capacity of a security guard. Research those training guidelines to ensure that the minimum training requirements meet the expectations and needs of your municipality. In the absence of sufficient state requirements, the municipality should consider mandating their own. Responders may be either armed or unarmed.

The jurisdiction may opt to have a session(s) with the private responders to discuss safety issues in responding to burglar alarms and expectations of public safety in regards to crime scene containment.

Advantages

- Rapidly and significantly reduces the number of requests for public safety response.
- Diminishes the need for an alarm management unit in the department.
- Reduces administrative costs and allows for the reallocation of officer resources.

Disadvantages

- Without strict guidelines governing the qualifications of the "private responders", it may result in responders with inferior training and may result in safety issues for the responders and the public at large.
- May cause deterioration in public safety/public relations.
- Increases the operating expense for the alarm user.
- May adversely impact those who cannot afford to pay for private response, resulting in citizens responding to alarms.
- Possibility of litigation if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss or an injury occurs.
- Possibility of more crime if criminals perceive that officers rarely respond to alarm systems.

12. Billing Alarm Monitoring Companies for Fees and Fines

This option requires the alarm monitoring company to collect any false alarm fees/fines that are imposed. Depending on applicable court rulings, state laws, and local ordinances and the cause of the false alarm (such as a violation of the local ordinance requiring enhanced verification), a jurisdiction may consider fining the alarm monitoring company. However, the billing of fees and fines must not violate substantive or procedural due process or interfere with the ability of alarm monitoring companies to conduct lawful business within the jurisdiction and state. In other words, the alarm monitoring companies must be able to control and act upon what it is required of them and have the full ability to defend their actions when necessary.

- Provides an incentive to the alarm industry to ensure that all those who use the alarm system receive adequate training to avoid false alarms.
- Reduces the administrative burden on the department.
- It is often easier, and more cost effective, to deal with several hundred alarm monitoring companies than it is to deal with several thousand alarm users.

Disadvantages

- No longer an incentive for the alarm user to change their behavior. No matter how many times a jurisdiction fines an alarm monitoring company, the alarm monitoring company still cannot prevent a false alarm from occurring in an alarm user's premises.
- Alarm monitoring companies are bound by their contracts to their customers and have no legal authority to compel the payment of assessments or fines.
- Can be inequitable if alarm users that do not have false alarms are denied response because their alarm monitoring company is delinquent on payments due to their inability to collect the fees from the abusers.
- Possibility of litigation if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss.
- Administrative burden on the department is not eliminated because the alarm unit retains the need to collect fees from each alarm monitoring company.
- Increases the operating costs for the alarm industry and the alarm user that will include administrative fees to cover the cost to companies for the added accounting management process.

13. Alarm Management Outsourcing

In this approach, the local municipality or public safety agency contracts with a private business entity to track and bill for false alarms and/or permit/registration. The local public safety officers still respond to the alarm signal activation, but the private company provides the warnings, bills and collection efforts for excessive false alarms. There is usually a false alarm ordinance in place that the outsourcing company uses as a guide in performing administrative services. A public safety contract administrator oversees the outsourcing company's efforts.

The outsourcing contract will specify how the private business entity will be paid for their services. There may be an annual lump sum payment due along with monthly invoices for services provided, or the outsourcing company may receive a percentage of monies collected or both. Each jurisdiction must decide for itself what it is willing to relinquish in order to have the administration of the false alarm reduction program performed by the outsourcing company.

Advantages

- Reduces the administrative burden on the department.
- Requires minimal to no startup costs for computers, staff or database programs.
- Can effectively and efficiently manage a false alarm reduction program without the need to hire additional in-house staff or pull staff from other projects.

Disadvantages

- Gets a private company involved in collecting a fee on behalf of the government.
- Gives a private company access to confidential information of alarm users collected on behalf of the government.
- Reduces the amount of money derived from fees and fines that can be used to offset response costs.

14. Broadcast and File

This policy has the 9-1-1 operators announce an alarm activation and the alarm address to patrol officers over the radio. If an officer is not currently responding to or on site with another call and is in the immediate vicinity, he or she has the option of responding to the alarm signal. No definite assignment is given to the officer regarding the alarm call and the 9-1-1 operator files the call away after the original broadcast.

Advantages

- Continues the possibility of public safety response.
- The criminal is unaware of which requests will receive response, unlike non-response where they know officers will not respond.
- Allows an individual officer to decide to respond if other more important requests are not pending.
- Adoption of this policy creates no administrative burden on the department.

Disadvantages

- Lack of uniform response may create perception or reality of inequitable response and/or response based on favoritism. For example, did the coffee shop get response because of its policy to provide public safety with free coffee?
- Possibility of litigation if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss or an injury occurs.
- Possibility of more crime if criminals perceive that officers rarely respond to alarm systems.
- Can meet with citizen and political resistance.
- May create a need to adequately inform the public of the policy.

15. Alarm Business Licensing

Alarm company licensing or registration can mandate that alarm companies and/or certain employees of the alarm company meet specific requirements.

Common requirements of alarm companies at a **local level** include:

- Attempted verification of alarm activations before requesting dispatch.
- Cancellation of alarm dispatches found to be false.
- Notification to alarm customers whenever a dispatch occurs.
- Assisting with registration of alarm users.
- Requirements to use false alarm resistant equipment and/or procedures.

Common requirements of alarm companies at a **state or provincial level** include:

- Proficiency requirements for specific types of employees (i.e.; Technicians, Operators, Sales persons, etc.). Renewal of license should require current or upgraded knowledge.
- Alarm systems should only be sold and installed by licensed/certified personnel.
- Requirements for criminal history background checks, including finger print checks.

The majority of alarm ordinance managers feel local alarm business licensing provides an extra tool to be used in successful false alarm reduction. The alarm industry, however, prefers state licensing, which reduces their need to obtain separate licenses in every jurisdiction in which they do business. In states that do not require licensing of alarm companies or the individuals, the local jurisdiction may consider local licensing. Reciprocal agreements with other jurisdictions can ease the cost and burden on both the jurisdiction and the alarm industry.

Advantages

- By licensing alarm companies, the jurisdiction has greater control over what those alarm companies can do.

- If an alarm company fails to perform the required mandates of an ordinance, the alarm enforcement unit will be in a better position to take immediate action against the offender.
- The alarm enforcement unit may work closely with the State Board of Licensure to ensure that installations are being made by licensed/certified installers.
- Provides a mechanism to conduct background checks on alarm company personnel that is unavailable through private sources.

Disadvantages

- If the alarm company licensing requirements are not geared to false alarm reduction or are not strictly enforced equally on all companies, the licensing may have minimal impact on false alarms.
- Can increase the cost of the alarm system for the alarm company and the alarm user.
- Increases burden on local jurisdiction

16. Installation/Manufacturing Standards

Many jurisdictions have had success by mandating periodic inspection and/or upgrade of alarm systems to meet certain installation standards.

The detailing of minimum acceptable equipment and installation standards within the ordinance can effectively reduce false alarms. For example, it is a known fact that 1+ duress signals cause false alarms. Therefore, prohibit the use of 1+ duress signals in the installation standards.

When public safety officers respond to burglar alarm activations, oftentimes they are walking into the proverbial "black hole." In order to provide the maximum amount of information to public safety, require that all systems be zoned and that specific information on that zone be relayed to 9-1-1 personnel when requesting dispatch.

Mandate battery back-up, require dual technology motion and glass break detectors, prohibit such false alarm prone equipment as money clips and one-button pendants, and define how many sensors can be placed on a single zone.

The SIA Control Panel and PIR standards provide ANSI accepted guidelines for the manufacture of these alarm system components based upon proven false alarm reduction techniques. The FARA Model Alarm Ordinance suggests requiring new and updated systems to conform to this standard.

Advantages

- Can significantly reduce alarms caused by improper equipment and improper installation of equipment.
- Adoption of this policy creates no administrative burden on the department.

Disadvantages

- Mandates can encounter citizen, alarm company, and political resistance.
- Can increase the cost of the alarm system for the alarm company and the alarm user.
- Trained inspectors may be required to ensure that new alarm systems meet the standards.

17. Criminal Sanctions

Criminal sanctions can be used for those alarm users or alarm companies, who ignore the civil enforcement penalties. For example, a criminal sanction might be that it is "unlawful to continue to use the alarm system without payment of required fees or assessments issued by this Code." The municipality's General Charter has the definition and penalty of "unlawful."

Most prosecutors can request a sentence that will require an alarm user to pay any civil assessments issued, along with a court surcharge and probation. By granting the probation, future offenses are easy to get back into the court system for follow-up.

- Provides a mechanism to address those alarm users, who do not pay the civil assessments and continue to burden public safety with false alarms.

Disadvantages

- Mandates can encounter citizen, alarm company, and political resistance.
- In order to enforce criminal sanctions, the enforcement unit/section will need a public safety officer for the departmental report, search warrants (if needed), submission to the prosecutor's office, and testimony in court.
- A court system may not willingly accept the burden of prosecuting these cases, which will lead to inconsistent or non-existent enforcement.

18.   Acclimation Period

An acclimation period is a specific period of time after an alarm system has been installed where the alarm monitoring company does not request public safety dispatch when an alarm activates. Incorporating a mandatory acclimation period into an ordinance allows new alarm users to make mistakes (i.e. become comfortable with using their system) without burdening public safety or incurring false alarm fees. The acclimation period can be for any period of time deemed reasonable. The most common acclimation periods are between 5 - 10 days.

An acclimation period is required unless a waiver is granted by the public safety agency because of demonstrated imminent danger to people or property. Either the alarm user or the alarm company may file a request for waiver. Emergency situations such as spousal abuse, recent burglary or robbery, or other traumatic situations may also be considered when determining whether or not to grant a waiver. Alarm users, who find themselves in these types of situations, are more motivated to learn how to properly operate their alarm systems and may be less prone to causing false alarms.

Advantages

- As with any new piece of electronic equipment, mistakes will happen, either by the alarm user or by the equipment itself. The acclimation period allows alarm users to get used to their new systems. It also provides a period in which the equipment can operate to determine if there are any bugs or malfunctioning/defective components, which can then be replaced before the alarm system has a financial impact on public safety and the alarm user.
- Adoption of this policy creates no administrative burden on the department.

Disadvantages

- Alarm users may be denied response during the "acclimation period."
- Exceptions can create more administrative burden.
- Possibility of litigation if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss.

19. Publish Alarm Company Dispatch Rates

A dispatch rate is the number of requests for dispatch made by an alarm company divided by its registered users in a given jurisdiction. The most effective means of publishing include local newspaper(s) and on a jurisdiction's web site. Lists may also be mailed out upon request. A municipality will have to decide exactly what information is included in the dispatch rate list.

If a municipality decides publishing dispatch rates is appropriate for the community, it is suggested that the alarm companies in the area be advised that publishing will take place. Each company should be provided with a courtesy copy of the dispatch list before it is actually published. If there are any glaring errors/omissions, this will provide an opportunity to correct the list before any possible damage is done.

Advantages

- Some municipalities have found that by publishing the dispatch rate, false alarms are drastically reduced.
- Publishing this information creates a huge incentive to alarm companies to reduce false alarms, which in turn reduces their dispatch rate.

Disadvantages

- Publishing dispatch rates can raise legal issues. Be sure to consult with the city/county attorney about any legal concerns that may arise as a result of publishing dispatch rates.
- Requires a manual or computerized process to obtain and track the rates.
- Publication of rates can encounter alarm company resistance.

20.   Cancelled Dispatch Requests

Since the purpose of alarm management programs is to reduce false alarms, an alarm company must be given an opportunity to cancel a dispatch when it is determined that the alarm activation is a false alarm. Mandatory cancellation should be part of any false alarm ordinance.

A simple way to verify that it is actually the alarm company requesting the cancellation and not an alarm user under duress is to provide the alarm company dispatcher with a code number/name when taking the call for dispatch. The code number/name could be the public safety call-taker/dispatcher's identification number or the internal incident number associated with each call, which would be entered on the call when the alarm company requested the dispatch. When alarm company personnel call back to cancel the dispatch, they simply provide the 9-1-1 center personnel with the previously provided code number. The code number would change with each request for dispatch, and, therefore, no concern about questionable cancellation would exist. Public safety can be certain that if the cancellation code is given, that the alarm company has determined the alarm activation to be false.

Advantages

- If alarm companies are required to filter out those alarm signals known to be false, public safety will be required to respond to fewer false alarms.
- Creates an opportunity to track the time it takes for cancellations as well as adherence to verification procedures.

Disadvantages

- Requires the implementation of a policy for accepting cancellations including a means to verify the identity of the alarm company.

Determine Billing Period

Most alarm management programs will define how a false alarm is "counted" against the alarm user for penalties or fees. Most allow the user one or two false alarms and then a fee or penalty is charged for any additional alarm activations. **Make sure that your program, including the software that will be utilized, will match the billing period you choose.**

Calendar Year (Fixed Period)

A majority of ordinances count false alarms on a calendar year basis from January 1 to December 31. Alarm users are charged for any alarm activations in the calendar year that are over the "free" count.

Example: Assume the ordinance allows three "free" false alarms in a calendar year. If a user had a false alarm in February 2010 and two false alarms in March 2010, s/he would be billed for any additional false alarms that occurred through December 31, 2010. The user's false alarm count would then "start over" for any false alarm activations occurring in the next calendar year; i.e., January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011.

Calendar Quarter

This is a variation of the calendar year. (May also be used for a 60 day or 180 day period.)

Example: Assume the ordinance allows one "free" false alarm in a calendar quarter. If a user had a false alarm in February 2010 and a second false alarm in March 2010, s/he would be billed for the March false alarm activation. The false alarm count would start over again with the next calendar quarter beginning on April 1. If the user generated a false alarm in July 2010, it would be the first activation in that quarter and would not be chargeable.

Permit Date Counting Method

Some ordinances count false alarms in a fixed 12-month period from the date of the specific individual alarm user's permit date.

Example: Permit date May 9, 2010. If the user has a false alarm on September 3, 2010 and three more false alarms in December 2010, there would be a total of four false alarms for the time period of May 9, 2010 through May 8, 2011. If the ordinance used a fee schedule, which allowed for 1-3 free false alarms and a fee of $50 for the fourth false alarm, the fourth false alarm (which occurred in December) would be charged at $50. A false alarm that occurs on May 9, 2011, would be counted as the first false alarm for the new 12-month period.

Rolling Method

Some ordinances count false alarms as the number of false alarms, which have occurred in a rolling period of time (typically 12 months) prior to any false alarm.

Example: A false alarm occurs on March 17, 2010. To determine what number the March 17, 2010 activation is, you would count the number of false alarm activations that had occurred from March 18, 2009 to March 17, 2010. If a user had false alarms on June 15, 2009, July 13, 2009 and October 4, 2009, the false alarm on March 17, 2010 would be counted as the fourth false alarm and would be subject to the penalties prescribed by the ordinance for the fourth false alarm.

Sliding Method

Some ordinances count false alarms within a sliding time period beginning with the first false alarm activation.

Example: A false alarm occurs on March 17, 2010. Any false alarm activations occurring after March 17, 2010, but before March 17, 2011 would be counted. If a user had false alarms on March 17, 2010, May 1, 2010, July 28, 2010 and September 23, 2010, the false alarm on September 23, 2010 would be the fourth false alarm and would be subject to the penalties prescribed by the ordinance for the fourth false alarm.

Again, make sure that your program, especially the software that will be utilized for tracking and billing false alarms, will support the billing period you choose. Some software programs will support all of the billing periods, others support only the calendar option. Using a fixed calendar year period is the simplest method to both calculate and explain to alarm users. Alarm users have a difficult time understanding the intricacies of the other options.

Start-Up Costs

The start-up costs for each municipality will vary greatly depending upon:

- the number of personnel
- whether you will be outsourcing part or all of the program
- the level of automation available for the program
- the cost of living in your area.

If the false alarm reduction program will be handled "in-house" using public safety or other municipality employees, the following are costs that should be considered:

- Personnel (amount and type)
- Office Space (lease or utilize existing space within the public safety community)
- Office Furniture (desks, chairs, file cabinets, conference table, bookcases)
- Office Supplies (paper, pens, staplers, etc.)
- Printing/Duplicating
- Photocopying Equipment
- Mailing Equipment
- Computers (desktop workstations as well as network servers and printers)
- Automated False Alarm Tracking and Billing System (with electronic interface to CAD or mainframe system that stores calls for service)
- Membership Dues for FARA

A registration/permit fee may provide sufficient funds to purchase/lease all start-up materials you will need.

FARA	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
	Chapter 6
	Draft Your Ordinance, Bylaw or Policy

After you have decided on the features you want in YOUR program the next step is to draft an ordinance, bylaw or policy to enable it.

The *FARA Guide to Alarm Ordinances* will walk you thru the steps to developing your ordinance:

1. Define Your Objectives
2. Decide The Scope Of Your Ordinance
3. Select Your Method Of Adoption
4. Pick A Method Of Administration
5. User Registration
6. Alarm User Responsibilities
7. Alarm Company Responsibilities
8. Locality Responsibilities
9. Penalties & Fines
10. Appeals
11. Confidentiality
12. Government Immunity

FARA Guide to Alarm Ordinances
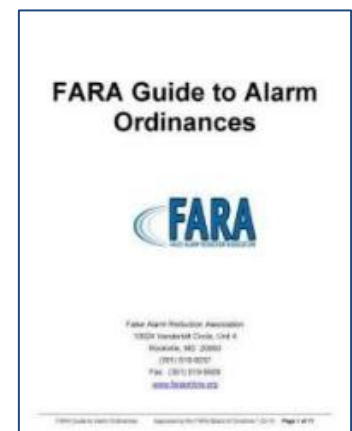
13. Severability

FARA has also developed a *Model Alarm Ordinance* that can be edited to create YOUR ordinance, bylaw or policy.

Some choose to edit the model themselves, while others give their selected features and the guides and model to their legal departments to let them tackle the drafting.

Either way, you will want to review how your locality has enacted ordinances, bylaws or policies in the past to address similar issues and craft your draft in a similar style and format.

	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
FARA FALSE ALARM REDUCTION ASSOCIATION	
	Chapter 7
	Get Your Ordinance, Bylaw or Policy Adopted

When you have your draft ordinance, bylaw or policy in hand, now you need to get it adopted.

Talk to people in your locality that have passed something to address a similar issue (parking, towing, etc). Ask what worked and did not work for them.

Ask the staff for the board, commission or council what they need to allow the issue to be considered.

Find out if a committee will have the preliminary review of your proposal and consult with them.

Prepare a presentation that addresses the need, benefit and cost of your program. Reach out to neighboring localities to see if they have information that might help make your case.

Seek letters and/or testimony from alarm industry, civic and business groups.

When you testify, be ready for questions and follow-up as soon as possible if you can't answer a question when you testify.

Key Steps Can Help Get Your Ordinance Passed

There are several key steps you can take to get your ordinance passed, including:

- Involve the alarm industry at the earliest stages of planning. If public safety and the alarm industry agree on an approach, a united front can be presented to command staff, legislators and citizens
- Try to get citizens on board as soon as possible – if the citizens feel they have input into the process, they are less likely to fight the ordinance
- Be able to define the false alarm problem through the use of graphs, charts, statistics, etc.
- Get buy-in from public safety command staff and legislators
- Show command staff how much time and money could be saved with a successful ordinance
- Show legislators that only a very small portion of their constituency would be affected by the ordinance (20/80 rule)
- Make sure that you have thought of all the reasons why you shouldn't have this new ordinance, as well as the reasons you should. Be ready to counter any opposition with facts and figures.

Prepare for Public Hearings

If your program will require a public hearing, attend a meeting beforehand to see how the process works. Attend a meeting of the board, commission or council that will vote on your ordinance, bylaw or policy and see how a similar issue was handled. If you cannot attend in person, you may be able to watch on local cable or on the locality web site.

Invite constituents to support your effort with testimony or letters. Line up your supporters to show widespread support. Identify any opponents and seek to accommodate any reasonable objections. Be ready to counter any outstanding objections with facts and figures. When your governing body sees the alarm companies, business leaders, home owner associations and others there supporting the ordinance, it will make it much easier for them to pass the new rules.

Be Ready to Counter Common Objections

"We pay taxes for police response."

Many citizens feel that police should respond to their alarm system, because they "pay taxes" and they don't feel they should have to pay extra for police response.

Counter - Only ___ of the citizens have alarm systems and ___% of those are wasting the most responder's time. So an ordinance placing fees and penalties on alarm users and alarm abusers will only impact those citizens financially and will benefit all citizens with better police protection.

"Requirements on alarm companies are unfair"

Many alarm companies do not want to be told how to run their business or be required to take on additional responsibilities.

Counter - Alarm companies have a responsibility to help reduce false alarms. Alarm companies know who the alarm users are. Alarm Companies can easily share information on avoiding false alarms and how to comply with the ordinance.

"Government cannot afford the program"

Time involved in quantifying the false alarm problem and obtaining buy-in from key people can be lengthy. Often there are insufficient resources/funds on the public safety side to devote to false alarm reduction. You may have insufficient personnel to develop draft ordinance and working documents or key personnel keep changing and little forward progress is made.

Counter - Investing in a program will bring benefits including reduced demand on public safety officers and improved officer safety. If the agency cannot afford the start-up costs third party programs can pay the upfront costs in return for future fines or fees.

"The fees and fines to alarm users are too much of a burden"

Obtaining approval from elected officials, who are reluctant to enact laws that will cost their constituents money can be difficult. Users especially the elderly and poor may object to the cost.

Counters

- o Fairly regulating false alarms reduces the burden on those that do not have alarm systems
- o Registration/permit fee for elderly can be lowered
- o Free responses before fines take place will exempt most from fines
- o Fines can be waived if user takes corrective action or completes an alarm school

FARA (False Alarm Reduction Association logo)	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
	Chapter 8
	Setup YOUR Program

Develop a Plan

You will need to look at the ordinance, bylaw or policy that governs your program along with knowledge of how your agency wants to proceed to develop a plan.

You will need to review the provisions of your program to determine when resources will be needed.

Here are a few examples

- **Example 1-** Your program may call for collecting permit fees in order to pay for software or staff to run the program. In that case staff may be temporarily assigned to get the word out and collect permit fees. Once fees are collected, permanent staff and software may be put in place.
- **Example 2-** Your program may be administered by an outside vendor. Significant time may be required for a short period to make sure the vendor set it up correctly and then little time may be required.
- **Example 3-** You may be authorized to bring on the required staff and software to launch the full program.

No two programs are the same: timing, resources, features and local needs will all blend together to make YOUR program.

You will need to pull together your program requirements and available resources and blend them to develop a plan.

Outsource or In House

Some agencies choose to administer all aspects of the program in house with sworn and/or civilian employees.

Others choose to outsource a portion or all of the program to a vendor. In the outsourcing process, a private vendor handles the day to day work flow; i.e., registration/permitting of alarm users, receipt of payments, mailings, etc., with oversight by a municipality/public safety employee.

Outsourcing is the practice of using outside vendors or service providers to manage certain business functions. Is outsourcing beneficial? For some jurisdictions, a strictly enforced alarm program may be costly. Allowing a third party administrator to have control could help reduce a jurisdiction's administrative cost, free up staff time to concentrate on false alarm reduction strategies and gain access to expertise and technologies that might not otherwise be available. However, outsourcing requires proper management and monitoring of the outside vendor or service provider.

Combine the term outsourcing with an alarm program and you raise a myriad of questions. Who pays for what? Who will collect the payments? Who is held liable? Is the data secure? Will the jurisdiction allow an outside agency access to their system? Who will handle the appeals? Who will field complaints? These questions will only be answered when you (your jurisdiction) decide on what you want, what you need, and what you are willing to pay for.

What Should You Consider Before Outsourcing Your Alarm Program?

It is critical to define the goals your jurisdiction wants to achieve through the outsource contract before beginning the process of outsourcing. What will outsourcing achieve? Why is it necessary to outsource? There are a myriad of different issues to consider, such as whether or not you will still maintain an alarm administration office within the jurisdiction and whether you want to achieve false alarm reduction, collect revenue or both. When examining your goals, consider the following:

- Will it free up staff time to allow them to focus on implementing false alarm reduction strategies?
- Will it reduce the jurisdiction's administrative costs?
- Will it improve customer service?
- Can you allow this business function to be directly controlled by a private company?
- How will outsourcing change your internal alarm management staff needs?
- Do you want the outsource company to perform all billing and collection functions and will that provide a more efficient way to collect revenue?

By going through this process, you will be more successful in writing a request for proposal and/or negotiating a contract that is both effective and comprehensive. It will ultimately aid in your ability to direct the work of the third party administrator and could result in determining that none, all, or portions of the program should be outsourced.

What Functions Can Be Outsourced?

You can choose to outsource an entire program or a very small part.
Functions of an outsource program can include:

• billing	• Printing
• collections	• Personnel
• mailings	• website activities
• data storage	• enforcement
• education	• suspension/reinstatement of accounts
• complaint handling	• false alarm reports
• registration process	• audit trail

The scope of work that is outsourced depends on the level of complexity in your alarm ordinance, your business processes and exactly what you want to accomplish. You might choose to outsource just the billing and collection of funds while keeping the enforcement and educational aspects of the alarm management program in-house. You need to decide what works best for your jurisdiction and department and work from there.

Benefits and Drawbacks to Outsourcing

Consider all of the possible advantages and disadvantages inherent in outsourcing the administration of an alarm program when deciding whether this method is appropriate for your jurisdiction.

Prior to making a decision on whether or not to outsource, it is very important to perform a full cost benefit analysis of what it would cost to perform the alarm management program in-house vs. the costs of paying a third party administration company to perform this service. Be sure to include not only the costs associated with the program, but with the potential for lost revenue, which may have to be paid to the outsource company depending on your negotiated contract.

Benefits

There are definite benefits to outsourcing alarm administration; cost savings and proven execution are the two most important.

Instead of having the jurisdiction cover the cost to staff the alarm administration program, the outsource company could bear the brunt of this cost. As part of the Request For Proposal and negotiated contract, the jurisdiction can also require that the outsource company bear all of the start-up costs, on-going personnel costs, office supplies, mailings, computers and computer programs. Even the cost of the public safety alarm administrator could be included as part of the contract. The options are unlimited for what you can negotiate with the outsource company. For those jurisdictions that have no budgeted funds for alarm administration, outsourcing can provide a method to allow an alarm management program to be implemented at little or no cost to the jurisdiction.

Provided you select an experienced vendor, another important benefit is proven execution. You can require that your third party administration firm demonstrate that it has already administered a program of like scope and effect for another jurisdiction. In this case, you would be hiring a company that is already set up (or should be) to perform the required tasks such as bringing a municipality "on-line". A seasoned third party administrator will have the expertise to ensure that both the initial implementation and the on-going management of the program will run smoothly. In contrast, if the municipality opts to purchase or develop software and administer the program in-house, even with the best software, it can be a huge job to:

- purchase/develop and maintain a software program
- customize the software to the jurisdiction's particular ordinance parameters and objectives

- train personnel on the new software

Other benefits to outsourcing are the ability to efficiently bring a program on-line, improving the speed of notification to alarm users regarding false alarm charges, permit renewals, suspensions, reinstatements, collection actions, and changes to ordinances, which could impact an alarm user. Having the outsource company handle the day-to-day administrative tasks provides more time for the public safety alarm administrator to work directly with problem alarm users and on other enforcement efforts, which will ultimately provide for a more successful overall program.

Drawbacks

There can also be drawbacks to outsourcing the alarm administration program. The biggest risk for the jurisdiction is choosing a vendor that fails to execute properly. Poor execution can result in a failure to reduce false alarms, loss of revenue, ineffective enforcement, and unacceptable delays. It can also create confusion and anger with the public and political backlash for your City/County and department leaders, which will not reflect well on the department.

If data is corrupted or is not available in a timely manner, the entire alarm management program will be adversely affected. The security of the database as well as determining how your agency will have access to the information should be carefully evaluated by your IT department prior to making any agreement with a third party administrator. Additionally, be prepared for some level of resistance from the alarm industry to making their proprietary information available to a third party administrator. This can be overcome with the execution of a duly signed confidentiality agreement between the outsource vendor and the jurisdiction. (Refer to Contracts and Confidentiality sections for more information.)

Most public safety agencies function in an environment that is seen mainly in a 'perception is reality' arena. As such, it is very important that alarm users be handled in a manner acceptable to the jurisdiction, as any contact with the citizens and business community by the third party vendor will ultimately reflect upon the government entity.

It is important to remember that choosing to outsource all or part of your alarm program takes careful consideration. Each jurisdiction will need to weigh the pros and cons to determine the appropriate path to take.

Bureaucracy in Hiring a Third Party Administrator

Oftentimes your alarm administration office is regulated by decisions over which you may or may not have a voice; decisions may come from your Commissions, legal departments, City/County Councils or Executive staff, which impact how you are permitted to administer your ordinance.

You may encounter the same level of direction if you decide to contract your alarm administration program to a third party. There will most likely be a detailed process, such as a Request For Proposal (RFP), which must be created and moved through your jurisdiction's purchasing or contract department prior to actually hiring a third party vendor to handle your alarm program administration. This can be a cumbersome, slow-moving process, which involves many layers of checks and balances, before it is complete. It is extremely important to create a complete and thorough RFP, which details all of the responsibilities of the outsource company, as well as your expectations and goals. This will provide any prospective bidder with everything necessary to make an informed decision as to whether to bid on the RFP or not.

The benefit in moving your outsource through this type of step-by-step process is that you are more likely to cover every aspect of the administration, and there are numerous opportunities to reword/rework sections of the process that have loopholes. One of the least attractive aspects of the procurement or contract process is that it can take an extended period of time to complete. Expect an average of 6-12 months depending upon the

size and complexity of your City/County and the work you expect the outsource company to perform. Conversely, to create a false alarm reduction unit within your municipality, including obtaining a possibly large capital expenditure, will also take an extended period of time. Expect an average of 12-18 months depending upon the policies and procedures that must be followed for your jurisdiction.

Contracts

Contracts, much like the RFP, are typically detailed in nature and can take an extended period of time to finalize. The jurisdiction's attorneys, contracts department and using department (public safety agency) should be involved in the development of the contract. Additionally, the outsource company will most likely also have their own attorneys involved in the process. It is critical to the successful performance of the outsourced alarm management program to create a detailed contract that specifies all requirements, expectations, goals, incentives, and non-performance consequences. Remember, you cannot require the outsource company to perform any function if it is not defined and iterated in the contract. You may be required to wait until the contract comes up for renewal (one year or more) to add functionality requirements, which can result in the dilution of your entire program. If a vendor does allow the addition of functional changes, even if they are not defined in the contract, expect to pay a price for the change order. This may be in the form of additional compensation or through providing a higher percentage of receipts to the vendor.

If, under the terms of the contract, the vendor will be absorbing all of the costs of implementation, you should expect to sign a multi-year contract, which will enable the vendor to recoup some of its start-up costs. Awarding multi-year contracts should both attract bidders and minimize the annual and total costs to the municipality.

Writing a contract for a third party administrator may be the most time consuming and critical part of outsourcing any part of your alarm program. Be creative! If you want the outsource company to pay for your in-house alarm administration official, put that in your contract. If the outsource company will be paid solely from proceeds of collections, that must be stated clearly in the contract. (Caution: if you consider this option, false alarm reduction may not be the primary goal, as the more false alarms there are, the more money the outsource company will make.) If there are incentives to the outsource company to reduce false alarms; i.e., they get bonuses for certain levels of reductions, state clearly what those incentives are and under what conditions they will be paid/made. It is extremely important to negotiate the best terms possible for your jurisdiction, regardless of whether you deem alarm management to be a money-making venture or solely for the reduction of false alarms.

Some outsourcing vendors also have a division that sells and installs alarm systems. This creates a perception that the outsourcing company might use its access to confidential information and access to potential alarm users to benefit the alarm division's effort. Consider prohibiting this conflict in your RFP and contract. Or, at least require disclosure so that you are aware of the issue and can verify that proper steps are taken to prevent a conflict.

The best practice is to ensure that all expectations from the outsource company are clearly identified and defined. Your jurisdiction will insert several pages of language regarding required City/County statutes, including insurance requirements, EEOC and affirmative action language. Be sure that the contract contains language allowing the jurisdiction to terminate the contract should the outsource agency fail to perform as expected. It is also important to include contract renewal language, which allows the jurisdiction to evaluate the program at specified intervals to ensure that jurisdiction expectations are being met. The consequences, should the outsource company fail or violate any provisions of the contract, should also be clearly delineated.

Scope of Services

The scope of services is a detailed list of what the third party administrator will be required to perform for successful implementation your alarm administration program. This is often a multi-page list of major and minor program features and functions that the outsource company will evaluate prior to submitting a response to your RFP or contract proposal and the conditions under which the jurisdiction will evaluate subsequent contract performance. This multi-page list must become a part of the actual contract that is ultimately signed between the jurisdiction and the outsource vendor.

The main point to remember regarding the scope of services is that it should be extremely detailed; no item is too small to add to your list of operational needs. Be sure to include what type of reporting you expect from your third party administrator, as well as how revenue will be handled and how often revenue reports will be provided. Depending on your agency goals, the reporting of alarm activity and the revenue reports will provide your agency detailed information about the effectiveness of your outsource, as well as provide information that might be necessary during internal audits.

If your agency is concerned about some particular aspect of the outsource process, then it must be addressed in the scope of services. This document is going to move through every function that an alarm administration office would normally perform and ensure that your selected outsource company will be able to achieve the same results. If your department administers every part of your existing ordinance, then the scope of services should detail what you expect the outsource company to do regarding every aspect of your ordinance.

Impact on Alarm Users/Officers

Outsourcing your alarm program should not impact how your law enforcement officers or firefighters respond to alarms. Your law enforcement officers and firefighters should be advised of any transition in the administration function of your program so that they are able to address any questions they may get from alarm users, as well as to assuage any concerns they may have on how it will impact them.

Alarm users should be notified of the transition to a new administration. A one-time mass mailing to all active alarm system users and alarm companies in your jurisdiction should get the information out and ensure that they know that the change is a 'paper' change only and will not impact law enforcement or fire and medical emergency response. Depending upon what is outsourced, there may be a learning curve for your alarm users and questions regarding why the change has taken place. If the outsource vendor does a good job of implementing and managing the false alarm program, the impact on alarm users should be positive, in that they will receive good customer service.

Plan for the Future

Few things last forever and that can include your outsourcing arrangement. At some point, you may decide to switch outsourcing companies or to perform functions in-house. It is also possible that the outsourcing company may decide to stop offering the service. Make sure it is clear that the jurisdiction owns the data collected by the outsourcing firm over the term of the contract. Build in a requirement that the data be provided to the jurisdiction periodically in a standard electronic format (tab or comma delimited text file) so that it can be converted for use in another program. Products that the outsourcing firm develop under the contract, including web sites, forms and brochures should also be provided to you in electronic format and should be the property of the jurisdiction. By planning ahead, you can avoid the worst case scenario of having to start from scratch when you decide, or need, to make a change.

Confidentiality of Information

The confidentiality of the alarm administration program information should be of major concern to your organization. This should include all alarm user/company information whether or not it is electronically or physically housed within the continental United States. Some outsource companies utilize customer service and IT services off-shore in other countries.

Information obtained through government-run alarm administration programs is often, but not always, exempt from public records disclosure requests. If exempt, the information contained in the alarm database or the alarm files may not be released to anyone outside the alarm administration office. It is imperative that you check your state's Public Information Act to ensure that alarm information is, in fact, confidential.

Even if your state does not hold information obtained through an alarm administration program confidential, you can and should still require that the vendor hold this information confidential. Ensure that the contract clearly states that all information obtained through the alarm administration program is strictly confidential. The outsource company and its employees, agents and assigns are strictly prohibited from disseminating any information, except to those alarm users, alarm companies or others who have a proprietary relationship with the information; i.e., the outsource company can discuss specific alarm user information with the alarm user in question, his/her alarm company of record, his/her insurance company, etc. Strongly consider the establishment of confidentiality agreements prior to or as part of signing a contract with your third party administrator.

You may have to have your outsource agency sign confidentiality agreements with the alarm companies in your area if your alarm companies are expected to share customer information in order to comply with your ordinance. Depending upon what/how you structure your third party administration, your local alarm companies may want a representative from the law enforcement agency to sign the confidentiality agreement with them as opposed to the outsource agency.

Alarm system users may be worried about the integrity of the information they provide to your law enforcement agency when they know that their information is being shared with outside parties. Every effort should be extended towards making alarm system users comfortable that their information is secure and that the information associated with the alarm administration office remains confidential and exempt from public disclosure.

Alarm Management Software

One of the issues facing False Alarm Reduction Program Administrators throughout the country is "How do I manage all this data and enforce the ordinance?" Most often the answer is to use some type of computer software system. This software could range from a very simple spreadsheet to a complex, custom developed major application. Choosing software may be the single most important decision you make in terms of the day-to-day operation of your false alarm reduction program. Remember, the more functionality your computer software can deliver, the less manual work will be required by staff.

The purpose of this manual is to help FARA members identify the major issues that should be addressed when acquiring or assessing False Alarm Reduction Program Management Software, including:

- Who should build the software

- What the software should do
- What information the software should capture

In many ways, managing a software acquisition effort can be compared to buying a new house. It represents a significant expenditure of money and generally time; you have to live with the results for a while or it is even more costly to move again; and you have to consider trade-offs between upgrades and options and costs. The manual will detail major phases of the acquisition process.

What is Alarm Management Software?

All Alarm Management Software should do the following:

- Manage Alarm Users and Sites
- Manage Alarm Businesses
- Process Incident Data
- Process Billing Data
- Manage Payments
- Generate Management Data
- Administer the System

Manage Alarm Users and Sites

The heart of your Alarm Management Software is the capability to deal with Alarm Users and Alarm Sites.

You will need to:

- identify each separate installed alarm system with a unique number or code
- connect that information to some type of identifying information from your Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) or other call tracking system
- match an installed alarm
  - o to a physical street address
  - o to a responsible alarm user
  - o to a mailing address for the responsible alarm user
  - o to an email address for the responsible alarm user
  - o to a phone number for the responsible alarm user
- have the ability to modify this information as it changes
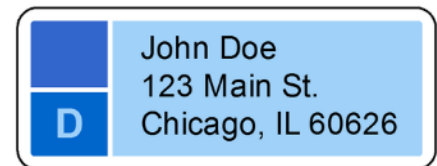
Register/Manage Alarm Businesses

You need the capability to capture basic information about the alarm companies doing installation, service and monitoring work in your jurisdiction. This information includes:

- Installing or servicing company
  - o Name
  - o State, Provincial or local license number
  - o Phone number
  - o Prime contact name
  - o Prime contact Email
- Monitoring company
  - o Name
  - o State, Provincial or local license number
  - o Phone number
  - o Prime contact name
  - o Prime contact Email

Process Incident Data

- You must be able to capture relevant information from your CAD or call tracking system and match it to an existing user or add a new user to your database if necessary.
- You must be able to correctly identify those incidents that should be chargeable as false alarms and those that are false but not chargeable, like weather related incidents perhaps and have the ability to modify that designation if needed (appeal process).

Tip: Manual data entry process is known to lead to data entry errors that can significantly affect public perceptions about your program. The most efficient way to process CAD data is to get the information electronically from the CAD/RMS system and have your software import the data and match incidents to users using whatever matching criteria you designate. You can aid the automated matching process if you pre-load user registration data into the CAD system, so that the CAD system can provide matching data (user identification number, name, address) formatted in the same manner as your data. This greatly improves the number of automated matches and reduces the manual matching workload. The major constraint on this is cost. In most cases, the CAD system may need to be modified to accept your data, and your data may need to be reformatted to fit CAD system specifications.

Process Billing Data

Your system must be able to generate billing information to support the billing process. This information includes, at a minimum:

- Account identification
- Date, Time and other data pertaining to the false alarm dispatch being billed
- Previously billed amount
- Current charges
- Payments
- Current amount due
- Delinquent amount

Your office may not be responsible for actually accomplishing the bill generation. Some jurisdiction Alarm Units prefer to have total control over the billing and posting of payments, while others simply want to generate the data and let someone else be responsible for creating the invoices and collecting the payments. Your software should support whatever method you select to generate the bills. Note that the billing function is not necessarily limited to alarm users, but could include alarm businesses as well.

Manage Payments

Your system must allow you to collect, store and manage payment information. Your software must allow you to match payments to accounts and to edit payment information as necessary; bad check, for example. If you process payments in your unit, make sure to coordinate with your internal control/audit office to ensure that your system meets their standards for management controls for money! If you are getting payment data from a central source, then make sure you know what data elements the collection source needs on the invoice and what data elements they will be sending back to you for your system. Ensure that you are getting back enough information to match the payment with an account and a reason; i.e., registration, false alarm fee, license fee, registration renewal fee, etc.

If your unit is responsible for accepting and processing payments by credit card, you must carefully consider what information about the payment will be stored in your system.

Tip: If credit card transactions are processed within your application (the actual payment transaction with the bank), the application MUST meet the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS) issued by the credit card industry. If only a secondary record of the transaction is maintained, your application should not store full credit card and/or CVV2 data associated with the payment or the customer account. If you use a third party application to process the credit card transaction, ensure that the third party application meets the data security standards. Your finance office should be involved in these decisions at the beginning of the process.

Follow-up on Delinquent Accounts

The system should include features to generate letters and reports to follow-up on delinquent false alarm dispatch invoices, non-permitted alarm sites and expired permits.

Generate Management Data

Your software should support the generation of routine management reports, as well as accommodate ad-hoc reporting when necessary. Management reports might include such things as:

- daily, weekly, or monthly payment information for reconciliation purposes
- alarm count summaries
- alarm user counts.

The number and type of, as well as specific data and format requirements for, your management reports should be sorted out as part of your detailed functional requirements documentation.

By definition, data requirements for ad-hoc reports cannot be pre-determined and ad-hoc reporting may not be directly supported through the management software. However, procedures for generating these types of reports should be described in detail as part of your system documentation. This includes what type of reporting software is recommended (Crystal Reports, Access, etc.) and how to get at the data itself (database or ODBC data source name, for example).

Tip: This is an area that can have a significant impact on overall system cost, but can also be put off to a later release as part of a phased implementation approach.

Administer the System

System administration means the ability to make global changes (one alarm company buys all of another alarm company's customers for example), add system users depending on your security procedures, administer passwords, and manage permissions/access. If your security requirements include limiting access to data or functions, your system should provide for some number of "roles" to which individual users can be assigned, rather than managing access on a person-by-person basis.

Tip: An example of how to use a role, you have a security requirement that dictates that only the office manager can modify payment information. Rather than map that function to a specific user, it should be mapped to an "Office Manager" group, into which you are placed. That way, these permissions are inherited as part of group membership and not tied to an individual user.

Basic Helpful Features

User interface (ease of use)

Graphical user interfaces (GUI's or gooies) make it easy for the user to use the software. For example, the location and spacing of data displayed on an alarm user information screen should be in the same sequence

and titled the same as the registration or permit application form completed by the alarm users. This eases data entry, as the user can tab from field to field and enter data without having to continually look at the screen. Another major design consideration is the use of click boxes and consistent labeling for common functions, such as always using OK and CANCEL instead of intermixing with ENTER and CLOSE.

Easy Navigation

You should make it easy for the user to move thru the program, make selections or issue commands by pointing and clicking the mouse and/or using keyboard shortcuts (tab, ALT+ some other key, etc.).

Pull Down Lists

Pull down lists and autofill boxes can be effectively used whenever there is a finite range of acceptable data entries. Requiring the user to select from a list of approved list enforces standardization throughout the entire dataset and reduces spelling errors. It is important that the data to populate the pull down lists and autofill fields come from a database table and are not "hard coded" as part of the application code, so that you can easily modify them.

Example of a list: You can set a finite number of street types and acceptable abbreviations for each street type.

Example of autofill: You may have an approved list of street name spellings; autofilling the street name as the user types can speed data entry and, again, reduce misspellings.

Error Checking

All software should provide some type of error checking. Examples of error checking include:

- Not allowing the user to put characters in a registration number string if the jurisdiction only uses numbers in the registration
- Only allowing certain characters in the columns that allow characters
- When entering date ranges for reports. The "To" date should be checked to ensure that it is later than the "From" date
- If certain CAD clearance codes can only apply to commercial locations, the software should not allow the user to modify a clearance code for a residential location to a clearance code that only applies to commercial locations

Error checking should include useful error messages. For example the error message should read, "Registration number must begin with X or Y" not "Invalid entry".

How to Select Your Software

Here are the steps toward selecting your Alarm Management Software:

- **What Are Your Needs?**
    - o Which parts of your program do you want your Alarm Management Software to address?
        - tracking versus tracking and billing
        - one-time user registration versus annual renewals
        - business information versus business licensing
        - automated CAD import/export
        - multiple types of billing notices
        - multiple reports

- ▪ types of permits, such as burglar, fire, smoke emitting, with different legal requirements and fine or fee schedules for each
- **Inventory What Resources You Already Have**
  - o Can your IT department help select a contractor?
  - o Can your IT department develop custom software?
  - o Can your IT department provide ongoing support?
  - o Do you have computer or network capacity that can be used?
- **Detailed Preparation Pays Off**
  - o The key to success in any software project is to develop and document a very detailed set of functional requirements that specify in detail what functions need to be performed, what data need to be captured and the business rules for every process that needs to be accomplished.
  - o The more detailed you can be about the features you expect and the way you want your software to work, the more likely you are to be satisfied.
- **Off The Shelf or Custom?**
  - o The options available for software range from off the shelf to somewhat customizable to custom built.
  - o The more custom work you need, the longer it will take to deliver the final product.
  - o What you need to decide is can off the shelf software do what you need or will you need a totally custom program?
- **In House or Outside Contractor**
  - o Implementing your software can be done either by an outside contractor or by your internal IT department; both options have advantages and disadvantages.
- **Cost vs Benefits**
  - o Software can eliminate or simplify tasks, but you may not have the budget for everything.
  - o Each feature adds cost, complexity and time to the development cycle. One example of a feature versus cost trade off is in printing bills and notices. The preferred option is to have the software program generate both the data and the printed notice; another, cheaper option, is to have the software program generate the data, and the user generate the notice using some other software program like Word.
- **Put It In Writing**
  - o When you know what you want - write it down. This is your way of asking for the features you want in your software.
  - o If you have not selected a developer, you should develop a detailed Request for Proposals (RFP).
  - o If you have selected your developer, you should write out a detailed list of features so your developer knows what you want.
- **Plan For The Future**
  - o Decide how you will get support to help you work with the program.
  - o Ask about audit trails and how you can track problems.
  - o Ask about how data is protected from viruses and hackers.
  - o Ask how your data is backed up.
  - o What type of warranty comes with the product.
  - o How will enhancements and modifications be handled.
  - o What routine housecleaning needs to be done and who will do it (data backups, database administration, network maintenance), etc.
- **Do Your Due Diligence**
  - o If you are choosing an outside contractor – check out references. Talk to the staff that will be assigned your project.
  - o If you are using in house IT staff - check with other departments to see how similar projects were implemented.

Hire Personnel

Generally, your false alarm reduction unit will be comprised of a unit manager, other professional level staff, and clerical staff. Titles will vary to fit the practices for your agency.

The quantity and type of employees needed to run a successful false alarm reduction program depends, in large part, upon the following:

- **Size**: A larger number of alarm users and false alarms covered by your agency will require more staff.
- **Complexity:** If your program requires several notices, personal contact or has provisions that are difficult to automate more staff will be required.
- **Level of Automation:** The level of automation you have will have a great impact upon the number of staff you will need. If you have little automation, obviously there will be a need for more employees to handle a manual process. The more automation you can get, the better able you will be to quickly handle daily workload and be responsive to your customers. Some jurisdictions have taken their permitting process "on-line" and allow or require registration of alarm users through use of the Internet. To learn more about this process, refer to FARA's white paper on *Electronic Filing of Alarm User Registrations/Permits.*
- **Types of Tasks:** At the beginning of the program, you will most likely need more clerical than professional level staff to handle the massive quantities of paperwork. There will be a huge number of questions from alarm companies and alarm users early on in the process, and you will need to answer those calls and handle any walk-in traffic you may have. Once your program is established; i.e., most alarm users are registered, most alarm businesses are licensed, computer program for tracking and billing false alarms is operational, database has been created, etc., you can scale back on the clerical staff and activate the professional level staff to deal with enforcement of the ordinance. You will still need clerical staff to answer telephones, greet walk-in customers, enter new registrations into your database, handle mailings, etc., but you should not require as many as you will at start-up. If you have installation standards in your program, you will want to have a technical person who can inspect systems to ensure compliance.
- **Civilian or Sworn:** Your unit may be comprised of sworn employees only, civilian employees only, or any combination thereof. Oftentimes, sworn personnel cost the municipality more than civilian personnel. A civilian, who says he/she works for public safety unfortunately does not carry the same weight as a uniformed officer does. Therefore, it is recommended that there be one sworn officer in the unit to issue civil citations, conduct on-site interviews with alarm users and alarm companies, train new recruits and provide yearly in-service training to veterans. While a civilian is certainly capable of performing all of these functions, and in many cases does, people sometimes will respond better to the uniform. If you have criminal sanctions for violations of your ordinance, you will probably want to have a sworn officer work with your attorney's office to present the case and testify in court. If you will be issuing civil citations, either sworn or civilian personnel can write the citations and testify in court. If civilian personnel will be performing this duty, be sure that your local law allows for civilian public safety employees to issue civil citations.

It is important to hire your manager first, as this person should be an active participant in staffing the rest of the unit. Your manager should have supervisory experience and knowledge of the false alarm issue. It may be difficult to find a qualifying person if you define your manager's position too narrowly, so be careful.

Every municipality will have different policies and procedures to follow when hiring personnel. Be sure that you are familiar with the particular restrictions and/or requirements placed on hiring in your jurisdiction.

Using your previously written job specifications, advertise for the manager's job. If you want to increase your pool of candidates, do not place restrictions on who can apply for the position; i.e., only current city/county employees are eligible. Once your manager is on board, you can then advertise, interview and fill the other positions within the unit.

Design Registration/Permit Forms

Registration/permit forms are intended to give the municipality pertinent information on each alarm user/location in your jurisdiction.

Registration or permitting of alarm users is a requirement in most alarm management programs. How that registration or permitting is accomplished and what information is required differs depending on the mandates of your ordinance and your business processes. Even with that said, however, we have found that there is certain standard information, which is contained in most permit forms.

In an effort to standardize forms used throughout North America, FARA has developed a Universal Alarm User Permit/Registration Form, hereinafter referred to as "permit." The reasons for such an undertaking are two-fold; first, it is much easier for new alarm units to develop a permit form that meets their needs if they have something to which to refer or to use in total. Alarm companies will also find it much easier to have only one form to carry, instead of a separate one for each jurisdiction in which they do business. Second, the standardization of permit forms and the information requested will facilitate the electronic filing of permits. Governments across the nation are moving toward paperless offices, where everything from taxes to bicycle registrations are filed on-line in an electronic format. The "wave of the future" for alarm permits will follow suit. The use of standard forms in this arena will greatly assist municipalities, alarm companies and alarm users in the electronic filing of alarm permit forms.

The information requested in the universal permit form comes from public safety alarm unit managers, as well as representatives from the alarm industry, all of whom have many, many years of experience working with the alarm management issue. We have made our best effort to include the most pertinent information that will be useful to public safety in identifying alarm users and any special or hazardous conditions of which officers should be aware when responding to specific locations. There are considerations, however, for most items, which will be discussed later in this document. You will have to decide, based on your ordinance, regulations and policies, which items to include on your permit form, keeping in mind that the closer you stay to the universal form the easier things such as electronic permitting may be in the future.

It is extremely important, when considering enacting an alarm ordinance and requiring permitting or registration of alarm users, that jurisdictions understand the Public Information Act applicable in their state. Some states hold alarm user information confidential and prohibit the dissemination of any information in the record to anyone other than persons in interest. Other states, however, do not consider information contained in alarm user permits to be confidential and require dissemination of such information should formal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests be made. Some local municipalities have confidentiality clauses in their local ordinances. However, if that clause is contrary to the state Public Information Act, and you have to defend your ordinance in court, you may well lose, as state law generally supercedes local law. It is recommended that you research the mandates in your state law to determine if the information you will be requesting of alarm users is information you would be willing to give out under a FOIA request.

There are several variables to consider when using the universal permit form. The following information is provided to outline some of the considerations on which you will need to make decisions.

Permit Fees

Most jurisdictions require some type of payment in order to register or permit an alarm system. The cost of those permits depends on several factors; i.e., what your legislature deems a fair and reasonable cost, how

much it will cost the jurisdiction to perform the permit process, and whether or not your jurisdiction is seeking revenue to offset some of the costs of public safety response. Discounts or reduced permit fees are sometimes given for certain classes of citizens, such as seniors or low income individuals. Renewal fees, if applicable, may also have the same reduced fees, or may even be calculated based on the number of false alarms an alarm user amasses during the renewal period. Choose permit fees according to what your specific jurisdiction is seeking to do.
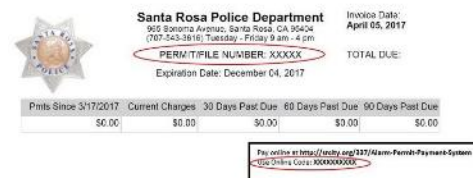
Credit Card Payments

If your jurisdiction will accept credit card payments for permit fees, include a section on the form that will give the information necessary to process the credit card payment. In determining if credit card payments will be accepted, keep in mind that credit card numbers must be held confidential and a procedure will need to be developed that allows for this number to be discarded, in a safe manner, after it has been used.

Permit/Registration Numbers

There are various methods currently employed to issue permit numbers to alarm users. Some jurisdictions have forms with pre-printed numbers. This allows both the alarm user and the alarm company to know what the permit number is without the need to send anything back to the alarm user or alarm company once the permit has been accepted. Others will have the software system, which is used to track permits, automatically enter the next available permit number when the form is entered into the system. Still others will provide blocks of permit numbers to alarm companies to use when permitting their customers. In this method, the alarm company will advise the jurisdiction what permit number has been issued to each specific alarm user. Consider these options when determining your individual business processes and select the one(s) that will facilitate the easiest, least obtrusive and most cost effective method.

Code Information

Many areas of the country have gated communities to which public safety personnel do not have easy access. If this applies to your jurisdiction, you may want to consider requesting the gate code, which provides access to the community, on the permit application form. Keep in mind that this information may become public information if you do not have appropriate confidentially measures in place. Under no circumstances should you ask for or maintain a list of alarm user's security system passcodes or passwords.

E-mail Addresses

Technology has flourished over the past ten years, and will continue to do so. For many, our main method of written communication may no longer be through standard postal service, but, rather, through email. This could have some positive effects, such as lowering mailing costs and providing for more immediate dissemination of information about alarm activations and any commensurate fees or fines due should those activations be false alarms. Requesting email addresses at the outset will save a significant amount of time down the road should this method of communication become the standard. One item to consider with email is the frequency with which email addresses change. Requiring annual renewals will yield a better chance that this information remains current.

Phone Numbers

As with email, millions and millions of people are now carrying and using cells phones; some to the total exclusion of traditional land lines. Consider what telephone numbers would best serve your needs in contacting alarm users and be sure to include space for them on your form.

Residential vs. Commercial Forms

The FARA Universal Alarm User Permit/Registration Form is dual purpose in that the same form is used whether the alarm user is a commercial establishment or a residence. Combining the forms into one means alarm companies will only have one form to carry and the jurisdiction will only be required to print one form.

Local Manager

When problems arise with national accounts, it is often difficult to find a person in authority with which to discuss the problems. Asking for and receiving a local manager for a national commercial account provides the name and contact information for the person responsible for the local facility.

Key Holder Contact Information

Contact information generally refers to people, other than the alarm users, who have the authority to and have agreed to respond to the location in the event of an alarm activation. These individuals may or may not have authority to request system repairs, but do have access to the facility. Some jurisdictions ask for more than two contact individuals, others ask for only one. Some also want to have the contact's addresses.

Special Conditions

The special conditions field on the form provides a free-form text field where alarm users can provide information specific to their location, which would be helpful to public safety personnel, who respond. While some criteria is listed on the universal form, other information that may be requested includes name and birth date of any children in the home, number and kind of pets, and health issues of the occupants (wheelchair bound, hearing impaired, etc.). If there is specific information you want, which is not listed on the form, be sure to include it.

Testament of Alarm User and Government Disclaimer

The paragraph at the end of the form, directly preceding the space where the alarm user signs the form, is shown as an example of what is possible and what FARA recommends be included. This paragraph serves two purposes. First, by signing the form, the alarm user attests that he/she understands and has agreed to comply with the alarm law and to pay any fees/fines assessed for false alarms. Second, it also informs the alarm user that public safety response to an alarm activation is not guaranteed and there are conditions or circumstances under which response will be delayed or not performed at all. Your city or county attorneys will probably want to put their own language on the form, but it is important to include both items.

Other

A few jurisdictions have found it useful to request contact information for the building or property management company that has authority over a specific facility. Should problems arise within that facility, the building manager could provide assistance to rectify the situation.

A few jurisdictions have also found it useful to request insurance information for the alarm user. Some insurance companies provide discounts to their clients, who have installed alarm systems. Should the alarm user advise the jurisdiction that an alarm system is no longer installed or operating, the jurisdiction may provide the insurance company with that information.

Conclusion

Permitting or registration of alarm users is essential in most effective alarm management programs. Why reinvent the wheel when so many have already developed permit forms that give you the information you need to run an effective program? The FARA Universal Alarm User Permit/Registration Form is designed with enforcement, problem oriented policing, and accountability already built in. It is our hope that this document will become the standard throughout North America, which will assist public safety, the alarm user and the alarm industry to a more smooth, efficient permitting/registration process.

Electronic Filing of Alarm System Registrations

Registration of alarm systems is required under most alarm management programs. As alarm registration programs are being implemented, local government agencies have grappled with a mechanism to easily and efficiently create databases of residential and commercial alarm users with active alarm systems. They have started requesting that alarm companies provide this information to the agencies in an electronic format, often absent any type of standard for what information should be provided or in what format.

This model provides a recommended protocol for sharing alarm system registration data and proposes standard data file formats for transfer of bulk information between the jurisdictions and the alarm business. It provides guidance on electronic self-registration issues, to include security and registration fee payments. It also provides guidance on issues related to "on demand" access to registration/permit information from either alarm businesses or alarm owners on features such as providing permit status changes and updates to information.

The most critical element of any alarm management program is the accuracy of information about installed alarm systems. Jurisdictions need to know where alarm systems are installed and who is responsible for the alarm system, along with information about the alarm system owner. This data is also important to the alarm business, along with changes in the status of the alarm registration made by the jurisdiction. Both the jurisdiction and the alarm business have a vested interest in ensuring that data about the alarm system is current, accurate and, most importantly, consistent between the jurisdiction and the alarm business. Currently, there is no standard, which identifies what data should be available about an alarm system and the owner and how that data should be formatted to facilitate exchange of the information between jurisdictions and alarm businesses. Having no standard means that each request for bulk data must be programmed individually at a potentially high cost to alarm companies. The model contained in this paper, therefore, sets forth a recommended standard to facilitate the electronic exchange of required information, which will improve the accuracy and timeliness of permit information and enhance the speed of the registration process.

An additional issue that is becoming more common is providing alarm system owners the capability to electronically self-register, typically through the Internet. This poses some specific issues related to security of information, validity of the registration and, where applicable, payment of registration fees.

There are two main methods of sharing data. The first is through bulk transfer of data, where information on many alarm users is transferred in one file. The other way to share electronic data is through on demand access. On demand access allows an authorized user to view, or even interactively change, information related to the registration/permit. On demand access requires that the jurisdiction provide some mechanism, typically through a web site, for identifying the registration/permit to be viewed, ensuring that the requestor is authorized to view and/or update the data, presenting the data to the requestor and processing any authorized changes.

The benefits of electronic data transfer for public jurisdictions and their alarm units are to help:

- make the alarm system permitting process faster and more efficient
- eliminate database errors
- reduce excess paperwork
- reduce conflicts over enforcement issues
- The benefits for private alarm companies are to help:
    - reduce inconsistencies between their alarm owner databases and those of the alarm permitting agencies
    - streamline the permit issuance process by reducing errors and extra paperwork
    - facilitate bulk transfers of customer data to and from alarm units

There are several parties participating in the communication of alarm system/owner and permit status information. The following outlines those participating and why they need to know this information.

1) **Jurisdiction or Administrator** - required to know alarm system and owner information in order to facilitate the assignment and renewal of alarm permits/registrations. They should also share information about the status of the permit/registration with the alarm company to allow the alarm company to take any actions that might be required based on the change in status (expired registration, inspection/upgrade to the system, denied/suspended response, etc.).
2) **Alarm Company** (includes the alarm monitoring company, the alarm installation company and the alarm dealer) - has the information for alarm systems and owners and should share with jurisdictions the information regarding the alarm owners and the type of systems they have. Alarm companies must also be kept informed about the status of permits in order to follow proper dispatch procedures and intercede, if necessary, with alarm owners, who do not have valid permits.
3) **Alarm Owner** - the individual or company, who owns/leases an alarm system. These individuals or entities should understand their obligations to reduce false alarms and to keep the information related to the alarm system registration current. They must also be made aware of the status of their permit so they receive the service they expect.

Bulk Transfer of Alarm System Data

There are three major events that might trigger bulk transfer of data. The first is the initial registration (when a new alarm management program is established in a jurisdiction or for new customers); the second is an update to the registration data and the third is a change in status of the permit/registration. Typically, initial registration data would flow from the alarm business to the jurisdiction; updates could flow in either direction, and status changes would flow from the jurisdiction to the alarm business. Changes in status would typically require significantly less data than an initial registration.

As alarm registration programs are being implemented, jurisdictions have asked alarm companies to help create databases of active alarm systems by providing customer data of their monitored systems. Two problems that have been encountered in bulk transfer of data are:

1) The data requested is not easily extracted from the alarm company's customer database, causing the initial bulk transfer of data to become a major effort for the alarm co mpany. Alarm companies that serve customers in many jurisdictions incur major costs in complying with the unique data requests of multiple jurisdictions.
2) Many alarm company databases do not contain the required specific fields in a parsed manner, which will allow for the smooth conversion of data from the alarm company database to that of the jurisdiction.

(Example: Street number, direction prefix, street name, street type, directional suffix all as separate and distinct fields.)

There are several methods available to implement the bulk sharing of data between jurisdictions and alarm businesses. Most jurisdictions (or the affected third party management company), as well as most alarm businesses would be reluctant to provide open access to their respective databases, and managing and controlling user access (user ID and passwords) may present a significant burden for smaller jurisdictions. Sharing data through bulk transfer of information, using standard data file formats, allows the alarm business and the jurisdiction to control and manage the actual posting of data, and reduces security concerns for both parties. The standard data formats significantly reduce programming requirements for both the jurisdictions and the alarm businesses; each only has to deal with one format to all recipients and one format from all senders.

FARA has developed a Universal Alarm User Permit/Registration form that contains the common information needed for an effective registration program. This form has been used as the base document for developing the standard file formats. The standard file format also includes some information that is not on the form, but is useful for tying the jurisdiction registration/permit account to an alarm business account; i.e., the alarm business's customer ID number. The data required for the standard permit form shown in the Appendix can be obtained from the alarm owner, entered in the alarm company database, and/or be delivered to the jurisdiction as an electronic file through email or FTP (file transfer protocol) methods. (Note that any security of electronically passed information is an important consideration. For files sent via e-mail, consider encrypting the file or the entire e-mail. Data sent via FTP should only be sent through secure, password protected, FTP sites.) Not all jurisdictions require all of the information on the standard permit form, and some jurisdictions may request information that is not on the form (second owner for residential accounts for example). We recommend that the individual jurisdictions work with the data as formatted and pick, choose and parse the data from the file to meet their specific requirements. Jurisdictions would have to work with the alarm businesses to develop procedures for obtaining information not on the standard form. This could be accomplished by having the alarm business mail the paper copy of the registration to the jurisdiction and the additional data could then be manually entered into the (already existing) registration.

Sending alarm owner information in an electronic format will usually make sense for both alarm companies and jurisdictions. However, in some instances, it may not be technically feasible for an alarm company to send, or for a jurisdiction to receive, alarm information electronically. Typically, it may not be technically cost effective for alarm companies with a small number of alarm owners to provide an electronic file. In these situations, a jurisdiction or its administrator should be flexible enough to receive alarm owner information via paper and update the information with traditional data entry techniques.

Bulk transfer also empowers the receiving parties by allowing them to control how and when the information in the data file is processed into their respective systems. For example, the bulk transfer process for new registrations allows the jurisdiction to develop and implement its own business rules for processing bulk data files and to handle any issues that occur. One possible, even likely, situation that will occur is that the alarm business sends a new registration for a site for which the jurisdiction already has a registration/permit. This can occur for a number of reasons, to include new owner or business, change in alarm monitoring company, or simply error on the owner or alarm business part. The jurisdiction has to sort this out and may suspend, or not process, the new registration until they understand the situation. This process also allows jurisdictions, if they have the capability, to validate (geo-code) address information on the new registrations to ensure that the alarm site is within their jurisdictions prior to creating the new record in the local database.

Another issue that has to be addressed with electronic transfer of new registration data is the payment of registration fees. While this model does not provide specific information on a recommended method for receiving payments with electronic registration filing, it does suggest some methods that are being used today.

Most alarm companies assist in filing the permit application, but the alarm owner typically pays the fee directly to the permit issuing agency. In a small number of jurisdictions, the alarm business is responsible for payment

of the registration fee. Some jurisdictions have devised methods to accept an alarm owner's permit fee from the alarm company. Some alarm companies collect the alarm owner payments and submit a single payment to the jurisdiction for all of the registrations submitted. For other jurisdictions, this involves using an escrow account that is funded by the alarm company, from which the jurisdiction's alarm unit can draw when a permit is issued. Another method being used in some areas allows alarm owners to charge their permit fees to their credit card, with payment of the permit fees then made to the jurisdiction's alarm unit electronically by the credit card company. (See further discussion of credit card payments in the Considerations section of Appendix)

This has an impact on electronic transfer, as the jurisdiction and the alarm business need to agree on a method of not only submitting payments for registrations transmitted electronically, but also for adjusting the payment based on registrations not processed by the jurisdiction for one reason or another. It is unlikely that alarm businesses would agree to set up escrow accounts for a significant number of individual jurisdictions; nor is it likely that multiple jurisdictions would be allowed access to a single escrow account set up by an alarm business.

In any event, payment of registration fees for electronic registrations will most likely require much more coordination between the jurisdiction and the alarm business than submitting payments with individual paper registration forms. Accepting payments electronically should not be discounted, however, because it will most likely reduce the jurisdiction workload by not manually processing the checks for each account. There must be extensive discussion and agreement among the jurisdiction, alarm business and the jurisdiction's Finance, Audit, and IT departments to ensure a smooth process flow, accuracy and timeliness of data and adequate security measures.

There is also a need for a jurisdiction to receive ongoing information on alarm owners for changes in account information; i.e., work/cell/home phone numbers, contact names and information, and alarm service cancellations. Typically, the alarm owner would be more likely to remember to notify the alarm business of these types of changes than to remember to notify the local jurisdiction. Occasionally, there is a need for alarm companies to send "bulk" alarm owner information when alarm service accounts are sold or acquired. We propose using the same data format for account changes as for the initial registration. The proposed standard data format includes a marker (flag) that indicates the reason for the individual record being included in the file (N for new account, U for update, D for delete (either for cancellation or for transfer to another account), T for transfer from another alarm business). This allows all of the records to be transmitted in one file, or individual files can be created for each type of transaction. We recommend that account transfers (either to or from the alarm business) be handled as a separate file so that the jurisdiction can process the file from the transferring alarm business, then process the file from the new alarm business. Jurisdictions may want to compare the files to ensure that both contain the same accounts prior to processing.

Jurisdictions also need to share routine account information with the alarm business, either as a recurring synchronization, or because of a change identified by the alarm owner, or due to a change in account status due to cancellation or renewal of registration (changes in response status are addressed in the following paragraph). We recommend a slightly different data format for transferring bulk data from the jurisdiction to the alarm business. This data format contains many of the same fields as the data format for transfers from the alarm business to the jurisdiction, but also contains fields for current account status (with the jurisdiction) and does not include information about other alarm businesses to which the account may be linked (service company different from the monitoring company). The format includes space for the alarm business account number for the account, but the jurisdiction may not have the capability to store that information in its database. The jurisdiction would populate as many of the standard fields as possible, and leave other fields blank. This file could be sent as an electronic file through email or FTP (file transfer protocol) methods. See Appendix C.

Jurisdictions and alarm businesses should agree on a time frame, as well as a method, for transfer of routine account information changes and for the transfer of data on new accounts. Using bulk file transfers significantly reduces issues associated with security and access account management, and allows the creation and transmittal process to be automated by both the alarm business and the jurisdiction. Most database management systems include the capability of sending email to a stored email address. This capability can be

invoked within a database program and would allow the creation of files and the sending of emails by the database itself. This process can be trigged by the jurisdiction or alarm business, or on a specific schedule.

Time Sensitive Registration/Permit Status Changes

Depending on the jurisdiction's alarm ordinance and procedures, there may be several critical, time sensitive items of information about an alarm system registration/permit status, which must be relayed to the alarm business. These may include account expiration and suspension and reinstatement of police response. Changes in these areas may impact the alarm business; for example, the jurisdiction may have a policy that penalizes the alarm business for requesting dispatch for a registration/permit that is expired or is in a denied response status. Similarly, the alarm business would want to know as soon as possible about the account renewal or reinstatement of police response.

Because alarm owner permit status can change daily, there must be a way to communicate a permit status change to the alarm company as quickly as possible. Currently, most jurisdictions are communicating these changes via regular mail, which introduces, in some cases, significant time delays between when the status change is made by the jurisdiction (and communicated to the 9-1-1 center) and when the alarm business receives notification. Some jurisdictions make daily updates to alarm permit information available via the web. One way to implement this is to allow the alarm company to enter an alarm permit number at the jurisdiction's web site and to get a status code. However, this is a "pull" system (alarm business needs to request status), rather than a "push" system, where the jurisdiction proactively notifies the alarm business of the change. Changes in account status can be transmitted electronically in several ways; a separate e-mail message could be sent for each account or changes could be aggregated throughout the day and transmitted in bulk. (NOTE: the email transmission method could also be used to notify the alarm system owner, if an e-mail address is available. However, most jurisdictions would also probably want to follow up with regular mail for documentation). For a bulk transmission, we recommend a separate format for transmitting these changes from the jurisdiction to the alarm business, since the amount of information required is fairly minimal. One other benefit to the limited data format is that it may also be useful for smaller alarm businesses that may not have the capability to process these files programmatically. The smaller data set makes it easier to view and interpret the data for manual processing. See Appendix.

On Demand Access to Registration/Permit Data

One of the more significant recent changes in how government agencies (at all levels - federal, state and local) interact with the public has been to provide electronic access to information that the government has on citizens; generally through the web. People are able to access information about their property tax, renew driver's licenses and vehicle registration, pay parking tickets and interact with the government agencies in many different areas. Because there are differences in laws and policies about what information can be shared with people other than the "owner," some information that may be available in one jurisdiction (anyone can see the property tax and payment status on any address) may not be available in another jurisdiction (only the property owner can view that information). Additionally, various jurisdictions have widely varying levels of technology, which also limit what information is available and what actions can be taken on that information.

Alarm owners should have a way to electronically verify the status of their permits and update information about their account. Ideally, alarm owners should be able to electronically review and pay any fees associated with their accounts. Allowing different methods for an alarm owner to obtain their permit status will enable the alarm owner to be more active in ensuring their permit is valid and information correct. Since it is the jurisdiction that determines when an alarm permit is invalid, it is important that the alarm owner have access to a tool that can quickly and easily relay this status.

Making registration/permit information available via a web site is certainly a viable method for sharing information. Depending on the privacy laws for the jurisdiction, basic information could be accessed by registration/permit number, owner name search or even address search. We recommend that jurisdictions

remain sensitive to the potential for alarm system information to be misused and, where allowable, limit access to information only by registration/permit number or some other unique code not normally available to the general public. Allowing general public ("guest account") searches by owner name or address could potentially provide information on which sites have alarm systems - or more importantly, which sites do not have a registered system.

Controlling access to this information through some sort of login code (registration/permit number) would potentially allow authorized alarm businesses (ones that know the registration/permit number) to also access this information, while preventing other parties from viewing it.

Since each jurisdiction controls the type, amount and format of the information that it collects and maintains on the alarm registration/permit, there is no preferred format for displaying that information. One recommendation is to design the initial web page to mimic, to the extent practicable, the registration form used by the jurisdiction. Jurisdictions may also provide other information (number of false dispatches to the permitted premises since the permit was issued/renewed, alarm response historical data for the permitted premises, fines assessed, etc.) about the account on subsequent pages. Again, privacy controls in place in the jurisdiction may limit what information can be made available. Another potential issue arises in displaying information about individual alarm call dispositions. Some jurisdictions may consider this information to be a police report; jurisdictions that charge fees for obtaining police reports (from the records management system) may need to carefully review with their IT staff what information can be made freely available on individual alarm calls.

Providing web access to data also presents other security challenges. Hackers are potentially able to get beyond the presentation screens to the database itself or the server hosting the site. If they can gain access to either the database or the host server, they can cause significant damage or install programs, which allow them to gain access to other computers and data stores, collect user IDs and passwords and change or delete data. Alarm managers must work carefully with their IT departments to ensure that proper security measures are in place to control access to underlying servers and to monitor, and detect, intrusions and unauthorized access. Providing access only (versus providing the ability to change data) limits vulnerability to some degree. Where possible, data for public access should be maintained on a separate server from the production data. It should only permit one way access from the production server to the public access server (the production server is allowed to communicate with the public access server for updates, but the public access server cannot communicate with the production server). Each jurisdiction must determine a balance between security and the need to share more extensive alarm information.

Providing alarm owners, and more importantly, alarm businesses, the ability to interactively update alarm system registration/permit data presents more complex challenges, particularly in the area of security. As a general rule, jurisdictions should never expose the production database directly to the internet. The security risks are significant, and extend well beyond the alarm management system data. Some jurisdictions may host the alarm management system database on the same server as other non-related databases (database management systems, like Oracle or SQL Server, can "manage" multiple separate databases on the same server). In this situation, hackers can obtain access not only to the alarm management system data, but to the database management system itself, which would potentially provide access to data stored in the other databases.

Typically, web applications, which provide the ability to modify data, are controlled through a user login account that contains some type of account identification (user name or account number) and password. The password requirement provides an additional measure of verification for the user. Typically, passwords are stored as encrypted text in the account record. Jurisdictions providing this type of access should consider some mechanism that notifies the alarm owner when an on-line account is established and when the password is changed. Providing more than one person with update access to an account or providing a single login ID with access to multiple records is an additional challenge, which must be managed programmatically.

The database or application needs to have imbedded rules that manage access to alarm registration/permit accounts based on some attribute of the registration/permit account and some matching attribute associated with the login ID. Login ID's and passwords can be handled in two ways. Decisions must be made regarding who will manage the user ID's and passwords, and to what extent the jurisdiction is comfortable with either method being proposed. Each alarm business could have a single account, shared among authorized alarm business staff. The local jurisdiction would set up the account and the alarm business would manage who had the account ID and password.

This method poses some issues for the alarm business; i.e., maintaining account security when an employee with access to shared accounts leaves the business (he/she could move to a competitor and access accounts from the former business) and managing login IDs and passwords for multiple jurisdictions are just two of the issues that the alarm business would have to resolve. Another possible approach is to set up a login account for each employee associated with the alarm business. Managing these accounts becomes a joint effort for the jurisdictions and the alarm business. Providing each authorized employee with his/her own password will require the alarm business and/or the jurisdiction to maintain a table of those permissions, which must be modified when the authorized employee leaves the company. One solution is to set up a "master" account for each business and allow the master account to set up and manage the sub accounts for that alarm business.

Allowing access to alarm management program data requires careful coordination between the alarm management program office, the local IT staff, and the alarm business to ensure data is secure and that local policies and laws on privacy are not violated.

Electronic Self-Registration/Renewal

Local governments are also looking to allow citizens to conduct virtually all of their business with the government via the Internet. This potentially includes allowing users to register the first time and then to renew registrations of their alarm system electronically. This presents some challenges, as well as benefits, to the local jurisdiction's alarm management activity. Self-registration allows the alarm system owner to enter initial registration information directly into the local jurisdiction's data management system. The data entry pages can be set up to mimic the hard copy registration form and should follow the data formats and rules included in Appendix B. Controls can be set up to ensure that data (particularly address data) contain valid entries through the use of drop down boxes for street, city and zip codes and processes can be put in place to validate address data against the jurisdiction's geo database if needed. If your system is not able to do this, then the registration will have to be reviewed by the alarm unit.

Security controls should be set up to allow the alarm owner to create his or her own login and password to access the system; user ID's, passwords and e-mail account information can be retained in the database for future use. The web site should use secure HTTP protocols to protect the data being transmitted. If the user ID and password are to be retained, then the site should have some capability to either reset, e-mail, or provide a temporary password to the e-mail address associated with the registration number or street address.

Determine which data elements must be answered on the registration form; web based applications can be quite flexible and require different mandatory data elements depending on user input (type of registration, for example). Consider including provisions to send the alarm owner an e-mail upon successful registration giving the assigned permit number, as well as contact information for the alarm management activity. One significant challenge is ensuring that the person registering the alarm system actually owns or manages the property. Registrations can be checked against jurisdiction tax records, although this will not work for renters. If your system cannot include an automatic validation, then the email would advise the alarm owner that the permit number will be provided as soon as the registration information has been confirmed. A related challenge is what to do with a previous registration for that address. The web application can be set up to check for an existing registration and notify the "new" owner that the registration is pending until the status of the current registration is resolved. The application can be configured to send an e-mail to the jurisdiction when this occurs for further investigation.

Jurisdictions that have registration fees will most likely have to link the self-registration process with a fee payment process. Applications that accept web passed payment via credit card have to meet tight industry standards related to security and information retention. If the jurisdiction has an electronic payment process for other fees, work with the Finance and IT departments to determine how to get the payment credited to the correct account. Additionally, know what the process is if a card is declined due to insufficient funds or because there is an error in the submitted information. In either instance, the system must notify the alarm management program that the payment was processed or declined for a specific registration number.

Electronic registration renewal presents the same security and fee management issues as does the initial registration process. If the alarm user did not originally create an on-line account to perform the initial registration/permit process and, therefore, does not already have an on-line account with a user ID and password, consider creating a temporary user ID and password for the account and include that in the hard copy renewal notice information. The account can be disabled programmatically once the renewal is complete or after a certain period of time.

Conclusion

Electronic sharing of data between alarm businesses and local jurisdictions can provide significant benefits to both parties. We have recommended standard data file formats, based on the FARA Universal Alarm User Permit/Registration Form, to help facilitate the sharing of bulk data between the alarm businesses and the local jurisdictions. While jurisdictions still need to work some issues with the alarm businesses, particularly those relating to payment of registration fees, where implemented, electronic exchange of data using standard formats should result in more efficient and effective communications between the two parties and more consistent data in both data sets.

Develop Correspondence

The correspondence necessary for daily processing depends largely upon the provisions contained in your ordinance. Try to develop as many "form" letters as possible to reduce the necessity of creating custom letters for each situation. The correspondence should be linked within your tracking and billing system so that the computer generates as many letters as possible. If you are using a software program it will likely include form letters that can be adapted to meet your needs.

Some of the more common letters include:

- notice to register/permit
- renewal registration/permit requirement
- inspection requirements
- notice of false alarms
- notice of false alarm response fees due, including invoice/statement
- notice of delinquent false alarm response fees
- non-response status to both alarm user and alarm company
- reinstatement notices to both alarm user and alarm company
- notice to alarm business to obtain license
- renewal alarm business license requirements

If your ordinance provides for non-response, it is recommended that any letter sent regarding the non-response status of an alarm user should be signed by the chief or sheriff. All other correspondence should come directly from the alarm ordinance manager or other unit staff.

Education is the key to a successful false alarm reduction program.

When you start or change your program, reaching out to the community to educate, inform and gather information will help you insure that citizens and the industry know your expectations and will take the time to be compliant. Groups to include in your initial education efforts are alarm company personnel, alarm users, community and citizen groups, and, perhaps most important, public safety personnel.

Ongoing community outreach is required because:

- A citizen might not have an alarm system installed until years after an ordinance is passed and will have forgotten any notifications they might have received in the past.
- Security alarm companies may not realize that there is an ordinance.
- People working in other areas of your government may not be aware of it!

Alarms are a regular part of our lives. The downside to that is when alarm users take the system for granted or become complacent. Keeping the community aware of the responsible way to use their alarm systems helps reduce false alarms that result in unnecessary dispatches.

While putting these programs together can take time, once you have them in place, maintaining the information is much easier. Additionally, the contacts you make in your community will help you with future projects and assist you with issues as they arise.

Prepare Informational/Educational Material
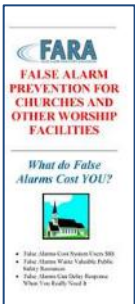
Prepare a short, concise brochure that lists the main provisions of your ordinance and any other information you want alarm users to know. These brochures should be used in your educational efforts and can easily be distributed in public places such as libraries, grocery stores, police district stations, community centers, government centers, etc. You can also require alarm companies to give your brochure to each prospective alarm system buyer along with the registration form. This way, you are sure to reach as many people as possible. FARA has developed brochures on false alarm reduction in English and Spanish that can be used by any agency.

You should also develop content for your agency website and social media pages to help get the word out.

Work with the Public

Update on New or Revised Program

- Set aside a time and place for education of alarm users and citizen and community groups.

- Prepare a press release that summarizes the alarm ordinance and the effective date.
- Advise local newspapers of the community meeting and ask that the newspapers publish stories on the new ordinance.
- Stress with this group the importance of knowing how to use the alarm system properly, what the main causes of false alarms are and how to prevent them.
- Advise the alarm user of both their own responsibilities, as well as those of their alarm companies.

Ongoing Efforts

It is important to continuously reach out to the public to contact new residents and provide ongoing information to the community. Following are some venues you might use to meet the public:

- **Home and Garden shows**
  - Set up a booth or table.
  - Purchase give away items with your name and phone number on it – Add a catchy phrase reminding them to reduce false alarms.
- **Local Festivals/Carnivals/Agricultural Fairs (4th of July, Winter Festivals)**
  - Partner with other local departments, share the cost (if any) and the time required to man the booth.
  - Hand out FARA brochures.
- **Neighborhood Watch meetings**
- **Police Stations**
  - Place information on your ordinance and have FARA handouts available at the entrance to your main police station and any community stations.
- **Local newspapers and television stations are frequently looking for local stories.**
  - Tell how you have reduced false alarms or plan to with your new program.
  - Create Public Service Announcements and air them on your local cable channel.
- **National Night Out, Police Week.**
  - Many crime prevention units have public events you can attend.
  - Ask the crime prevention unit to include false alarm reduction in their presentations.
- **Real Estate**
  - Reach out to Real Estate Associations
  - Provide information and education at meetings.
  - Supply them with information regarding your ordinance; educate the agents on potential causes of false alarms and how to prevent them.
  - Supply agents with FARA brochures for their clients.
- **Community Groups**
  - Reach out to local civic and homeowners associations.
  - Offer to speak at meetings or community fairs.
  - Some larger communities have association councils that may include representatives from all of the groups in your jurisdiction.
  - Check with your local elected officials to see if you should be included in local community meetings that they host for the community.
- **Business Groups**
  - Contact your local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, etc. to see if you can speak at a meeting.
- **Better Business Bureau**

- Reach out to your local Better Business Bureau to educate them on your local requirements. Potential alarm users often contact them when considering a purchase.
- Hand out FARA brochures and provide a link to the website.
- **Alarm User Awareness Schools**
  - Host a meeting and leave it open to those considering purchasing an alarm system, as well as those who already have one and need some follow up training.

Work with the Industry

Update on New or Revised Program

Have an open meeting of all alarm companies that conduct business in your municipality. Be sure to educate alarm company personnel about the responsibilities or the alarm company and the alarm user under the new or revised ordinance.

- Have your chief or sheriff, whenever possible, open the meeting with a welcome that includes a frank statement about the seriousness of the false alarm problem and what it means to public safety. Your chief's or sheriff's presence will, in and of itself, lend more credence to the extent of the problem and public safety's commitment to deal with false alarms.
- Once the welcome is made, your alarm ordinance manager should take over the meeting and describe, in detail, all alarm company and alarm user responsibilities. Provide ample time at the end of the meeting to answer questions. Use your graphs, pie charts, etc. during the presentation to graphically display the scope of your municipality's false alarm issue.
- Some attendees may try to use the meeting to complain about the ordinance rather than as a constructive tool to learn responsibilities. Advise that the time to raise objections was during the work sessions and enactment of the alarm ordinance.
- If you are going to require alarm companies to register their customers, you must have sufficient registration materials available to hand out at the meeting. If you require alarm business licensing, distribute licensing materials as well.

Ongoing Efforts

- **Contact the local chapter of the ESA, CANASA or NESA**
  - To find your local chapter, visit http://esaweb.org, http://canasa.org or http://www.nesaus.org.
- **Attend a Local Meeting**
  - Most industry associations hold regular meetings and would welcome public safety attendance as a presenter. Discuss your ordinance, current false alarm rates, and how you want to partner with the industry to improve communication and reduce false alarms together.
- **Host a meeting for industry members**
  - Provide attendees with your alarm ordinance, permit applications and updates or recent changes.
  - Discuss ways to reduce unnecessary dispatches utilizing enhanced call verification, video verification, and multiple zone trips.
  - Ask what programs they are currently working on.
- **Create a Matrix**
  - Work with local alarm coordinators in your region to create an easy to follow matrix of all alarm ordinances in your area.
  - Share the matrix with the alarm industry.

- Highlight all respective local requirements and include contact names, numbers and email addresses for alarm coordinators.
  - Update the matrix on an annual basis.
- **Trade Shows**
  - Many local associations have a small trade show each year
  - Contact the show organizer to see if they will allow you to have a booth. Set up can be very simple; all you need is a table and friendly smile.
  - Pass out small trinkets and information about reducing false alarms.
  - Showcase your own false alarm program and have FARA brochures on hand.
  - Direct attendees to the web site where they can get more information/brochures to share with their customers.
- **Reach out to Local Companies**
  - Establish contacts and develop relationships with industry leaders and learn about the latest technology available for reducing false alarms.
  - Visit local monitoring stations and invite some of their team to tour your communications center.
  - Dedicate a few days each month to just drop in on some of your local alarm companies. You will get to know them better and they will be able to put a face with a name. You can share ideas, listen to concerns and work on developing lasting working relationships.

All of these are excellent opportunities to communicate with the industry and learn what plans there are for the future in regards to technology, procedures and standards.

Work with Public Safety

Update on New or Revised Program

- Educate patrol officers, supervisors, and 9-1-1 staff early on in the process of the requirements in the new or revised ordinance.
- Patrol officers need to know that the false alarm reduction unit's main goal is to reduce false alarms to which police must respond, thereby giving them more time to engage in true public safety activities.
- Plan to attend roll-call for each shift to explain what the officers will be required to do.
- Be ready to field hostile comments from some officers.
- Let the officers know that you will do everything possible to fully enforce the law, which will result in fewer false alarms.
- Ask them to give you time to show positive results and ask for their cooperation.

Ongoing Efforts

- The alarm ordinance manager should also ask for a block of time to speak before each and every recruit class on the false alarm issue.
- It is often easier to get new recruits, who have no experience in responding to false alarms, to buy into the false alarm reduction program.
- The more education patrol officers have, the more successful your program will be.

Reach Out To Neighboring Jurisdictions

Working together, you can touch more people and get more done.

- Host a meeting with alarm coordinators from neighboring jurisdictions on a regular basis. It can be a simple meeting at your office or local library to:
  - Compare alarm ordinances, fees, etc.
  - Compare issues surrounding false alarms.
  - Problem solve and share ideas.
  - Share contact information.
  - Invite industry members to participate.
- Create a FARA Chapter.

Provide Training

For the Public

- See how to set up a false alarm training school at the FARA website.
- Provide documentation to local businesses for their employee training programs.

For the Alarm Industry

- FARA has partnered with Elite CEU to create a series of on-line courses specifically for the alarm industry. Each course is one hour. The first course, which was written by public safety FARA members, is a general overview of the false alarm issue from a public safety perspective. Elite CEU hosts the course and is responsible for providing completion certificates to students. They are also responsible for getting the course certified in various states to meet licensing CEU requirements.
- Future courses will include information on:

  - The security technician, salesperson, central station operator and owner/manager roles in reducing false alarms.
  - False alarm prevention related to specific equipment such as control panels, hold-up, and/or panic and duress alarms, and various devices.
  - How the monitoring center can institute best practices to reduce false alarms.

For Public Safety

- Request that information about your alarm program become part of the new recruit and officer in-service training.
  - Ask if you can serve as the instructor.
- Request a training block with all new 9-1-1 operators to train them on the alarm ordinance:
  - Why they need to capture specific information.
  - How capturing specific information ultimately helps in the safety of the responding officer and helps the alarm office with enforcement.
- Ride along with patrol officer's regularly; see if any tools, such as brochures, would be beneficial to officers to leave for alarm users especially if they have just responded to a false alarm.

Website

Your well designed web site will make it easy for citizens and the alarm industry to have access to important information so that everyone can be compliant in your jurisdiction.

- Provide information on your alarm ordinance.
- Provide answers to FAQ's from citizens.

- Provide information on how to obtain an alarm user permit and provide links to applications.
- Provide information on how to obtain a license for a business or technician, if applicable.
- Provide tips on how to reduce false alarms (link to FARA's one-page bulletins on our web site addressing more than 25 different causes of and solutions to false alarms).

![FARA logo](FARA FALSE ALARM REDUCTION ASSOCIATION)	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
	Chapter 10
	Enforce YOUR Program

The effectiveness of your alarm ordinance will depend in large part upon how well you enforce the ordinance you have. There is no quicker way to "lose face" than to enact an ordinance that you don't ultimately enforce. You might even find that false alarms increase if alarm users and alarm companies realize that there will be no follow-up by public safety to continued false alarms. Therefore, even if you do not believe your ordinance has sufficient "teeth" to make a marked impact at the beginning, you must vigorously enforce the provisions you were able to include.

Methods of encouraging responsible alarm system use and or encouraging compliance with your program include:

- Fines/Fees for false alarms
- Civil Penalties
- Suspending law enforcement response to an alarm site and/or by revoking the alarm registration

Review the FARA Guide to Alarm Ordinances for more information on administering fines.

If you do not have the staff or resources to enforce all aspects of your ordinance, choose to strictly enforce those that will have the greatest impact on false alarms; i.e., false alarm response fees, non-response provisions, and required inspection/upgrade. Continually request additional staff that will allow you to enforce all provisions of your ordinance.

![FARA logo](FARA FALSE ALARM REDUCTION ASSOCIATION)	False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
	Chapter 11
	Evaluation & Reporting

Evaluate the Effectiveness of YOUR Program

- Compare the police dispatch rate before and after your ordinance was adopted or changed.
- Review the number of appeals.
- Consider the amount of staff time devoted to implementing the program.
- Consider a random survey for alarm users, public safety officers and alarm companies.
- Consult with command staff, elected officials and 911 center personnel to determine their satisfaction with the program.
- Look at the level of enforcement that is being done. Are all provisions enforced to the fullest? Will greater enforcement have a positive impact on reductions?
- Determine how much time (hours and work years) and money was *saved* through implementation and enforcement of the ordinance.
- Determine how much time (hours and work years) and money was *spent* on response to false alarms.
- How much revenue was generated, billed and collected?
- Are statistics kept separately for residential and commercial alarm users? Do statistics indicate that more resources should be spent on one group over another?
- How many alarm users have one or more false alarm from year to year? Are they the same users or different ones? Are there more users each year with fewer false alarms or more?
- Perform statistical analysis on the number of alarm users, false alarms, and actual events.

Review and Adjust YOUR Program

As you evaluate, review and analyze policies and procedures, the real benefit comes from developing and implementing new and/or revised procedures to correct deficiencies or to make the program more effective.

- Ask unit staff for suggestions.
- Review policies and procedures that have succeeded in other jurisdictions.
- Evaluate whether or not these policies and procedures have a chance to succeed in your jurisdiction.
- Consider if available technology might make your program more effective.
- Evaluate community awareness of your program.
- Examine newly adopted policies and procedures to see if they have been effective.
- Review related department programs, including community or public relations and crime or fire prevention programs and community policing initiatives, to see if they can be used to make your program more effective.
- Continually look at your program, identify areas that need improvement and implement initiatives to deal with these areas.

Use the Data to Succeed

A statistical analysis of your program allows you to apply resources, determine problematic areas, determine trends, and provide the basis for new initiatives.

Examine segments of available data to determine trends. For example compare police dispatch rates for commercial and residential alarm users. Or, look at the number of permits in service areas to see if one area is

more compliant than another. Look at data on causes of false alarms to see if trends are present. Calculate the time of day and days of the week when most false alarms occur. Are any false alarms seasonal; i.e., holidays, summer, Easter break? Why?

How to Create the Most Effective Annual Report

Writing annual reports can often be burdensome and take a fair amount of time to do well, but the rewards of presenting the best overall picture of what you have accomplished over the past year often outweigh any inconvenience it causes. Annual reports allow you to educate elected and appointed leaders in your locality, the general public and the alarm industry on exactly what you have done and why. By reporting on the successes or failures of those efforts, you can bring the alarm management program to the forefront in your community.

Annual reports do not necessarily have to report only successful programs. In fact, if you are trying to justify amendments to your alarm ordinance or changes in policy or procedure, annual reports can be an excellent way to describe the problems and discuss ways in which to address those challenges.

This manual is designed to assist you to develop your own annual report. If your command staff is only looking for statistics, obviously that is what you give them. If, however, you have been given no direction on what the contents of your annual report should include, then the sky's the limit. The tips and information provided in this guide will help you to lay out your report in a cohesive fashion and serve as a reminder of what you may want to include.

Considerations

There are several ways in which you can design and present your annual report. The following information outlines the main points you may wish to make in your report and clarifies exactly what data you need/want to report.

      A. Select a Format
      B. Decide What to Include
            1.   Summarize Your Report
            2.   Summarize Your Ordinance, Mission and Purpose
            3.   Alarm User and False Alarm Rate Statistics
            4.   Revenue
            5.   Savings
            6.   Expenditures
            7.   Major Accomplishments/New Initiatives
            8.   Ordinance Implementation and Review
            9.   Public Relations
            10.   Future Plans

Select a Format

If no direction has been given on the contents or format of your annual report, you can include as much or as little information as you want or deem appropriate. Most annual reports include a combination of straight text along with graphs and/or charts to illustrate performance. Some reports, however, contain statistical data only or narrative only. Try to determine what would be most effective for you to exemplify the points you will make in the report.

Keep in mind that the people reading your annual report will not generally be as knowledgeable of, or perhaps interested in, the subject matter as you are. When you have finished your report, give it to someone, who

knows nothing about alarms or the alarm program, and get feedback on whether or not the messages you are trying to impart come through clearly.

Pie and bar graphs can be quite impressive and provide a visual to your narrative. Graphs and charts also help to break up straight text. They sometimes provide a clearer picture of the success of the program over a period of time. Excel, within the Microsoft Office Suite, provides an excellent means to create many different types of graphs, but use whatever you are comfortable with or have at your disposal.

What to Include

1. **Summarize Your Report** - Include a one- or two-page summary sheet at the beginning of your annual report, which encapsulates what the full report illustrates. Some in authority will not have the time to devote to reading a full report, but will take the time to review the summary, which can show successes, accomplishments, and even failures, in bullet or outline form or through graphs and charts.

2. **Summarize Your Ordinance, Mission and Purpose** - Including a synopsis, along with a statement of the purpose, of your alarm ordinance is a good way to provide readers with the foundation of your alarm management program. If you have a mission statement for your unit, section or division, you may want to include it to demonstrate how your work satisfies that statement. You may also want to include a short summary of the duties of the alarm administrator so that readers understand the scope of your responsibilities and authority.

3. **Alarm User and False Alarm Rate Statistics** - Before you can begin providing statistical analysis of your data, you must first determine your baseline. A recommended start is the year before enforcement of your alarm ordinance was implemented. This will provide information on what the numbers looked like absent alarm ordinance enforcement, and then how those numbers changed when the ordinance was implemented. Over time, you can show reductions/increases from year to year and also from the baseline. If you have made major changes to your ordinance or how it is implemented or enforced since it was enacted, this may become your new baseline or should be noted as a point of reference.

Show Changes in Number of Alarm users

It is helpful to show if the number of users is growing and by how much.

Growth in Total # of Alarm Users, 1995 - 2015
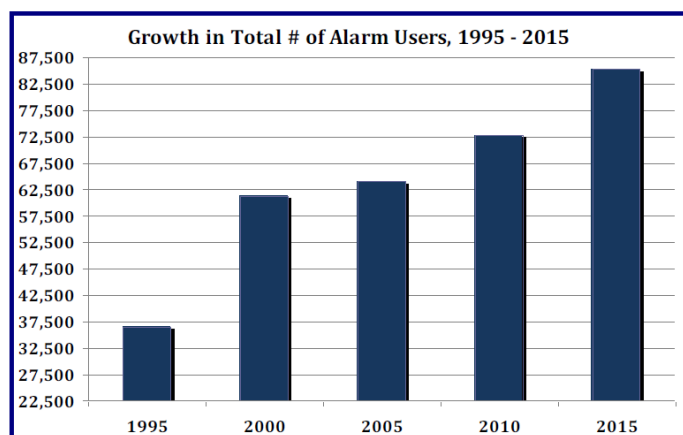
Show Requests vs Actual Responses

It is helpful to show the impact of accepting cancellation of alarms from users and alarm companies and the impact of not responding to sites without a permit or sites with suspended response.
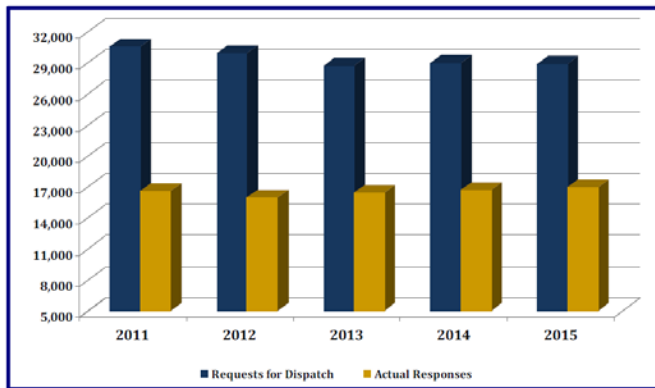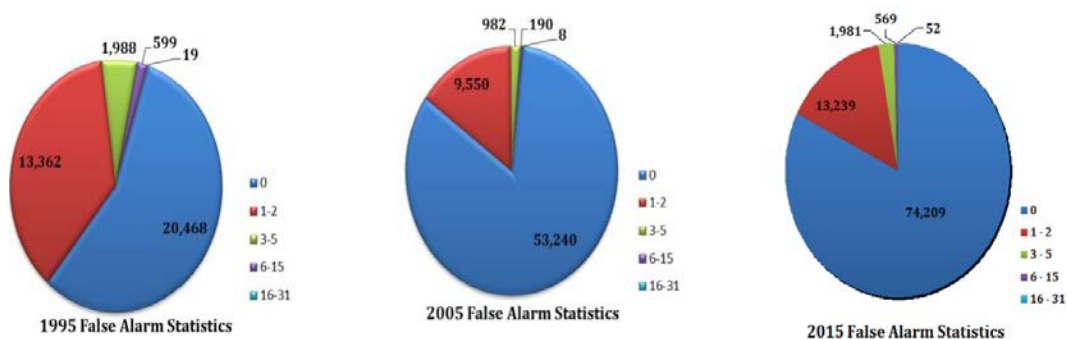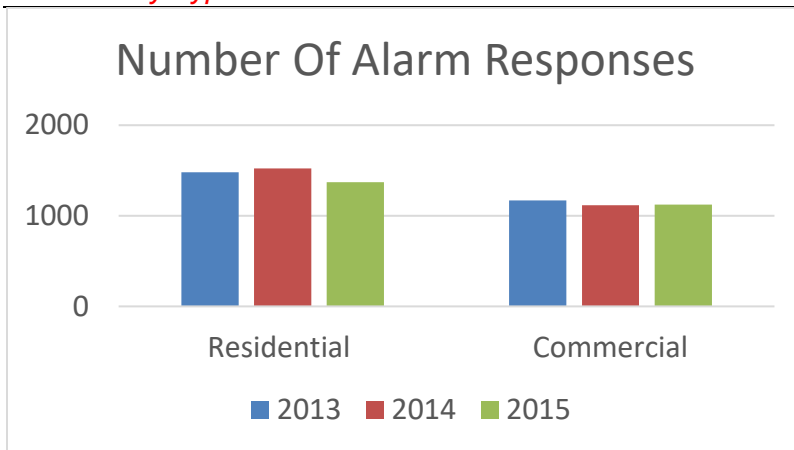

Reponses vs Total Users

Helpful to show the number of users who did not have a false alarm.

2015 Total Users = 85,167		2005 Total Users = 63,970		1995 Total Users = 36,436	
False Alarms	Alarm Users	False Alarms	Alarm Users	False Alarms	Alarm Users
0	74,313	0	53,240	0	20,468
1-2	9,708	1-2	9,550	1-2	13,362
3-5	934	3-5	982	3-5	1,988
6-15	199	6-15	190	6-15	599
16-31	13	16-31	8	16-31	19

Number of Users with No False Alarms				
	1995	2005	2015	% Change
Commercial	2,352	5,730	7,253	208.40
Residential	18,116	47,510	67,204	271.00

1995 False Alarm Statistics

2005 False Alarm Statistics

2015 False Alarm Statistics

Number Of Alarm Responses

Revenue

Chances are that the revenue generated by your alarm management program goes into a municipal general fund and not back to your unit or even your department. In these cases, it is critical to show how much revenue your program generates so that your budget office can use that information to help justify maintaining or increasing the budget for your program.

While generating revenue is not, in most cases, the most important part of an effective alarm management program, it is highly important to fiscal, legislative and management personnel. As such, it is important to include all sources of revenue generation, as well as your efforts to collect monies due to the municipality.

Sources of revenue may include:

- Initial Permit/Registration Fees
- Renewal Fees
- False Alarm Response Fees/Fines
- Appeal Fees
- Alarm Business License/Registration Fees
- Civil Citations
- Late Payment Fees
- Interest

Consider breaking out your revenue by calendar year and by fiscal year.

Example – Calendar Year Revenue

CALENDAR YEAR	ACTUAL REVENUES
Alarm User Registration Fees	
Residential	$168,870
Commercial	28,380
TOTAL	$197,250
Alarm User Registration Renewal Fees	$194,575
Residential	31,440
Commercial	$226,015
TOTAL	
False Alarm Response Fees	
Residential	$ 95,229
County Attorney Collections	12,450
Total Residential	$107,679
Commercial	$375,839
County Attorney Collections	37,885
Total Commercial	$413,724
TOTAL	$521,403
Alarm Business Fees	
License	$ 71,460
Civil Citations	22,250
Administrative Fees	3,446
TOTAL	$ 97,176
Appeal Filing Fees	
Residential	$ 720
Commercial	285
TOTAL	$ 1,005
GRAND TOTAL	$1,042,849

Example – Fiscal Year Revenue

FISCAL YEAR	ACTUAL REVENUES
Alarm User Registration Fees	
Residential	$170,200
Commercial	27,930
TOTAL	$198,130
Alarm User Registration Renewal Fees	$202,630
Residential	37,890
Commercial	$240,520
TOTAL	
False Alarm Response Fees	
Residential	$111,210
County Attorney Collections	12,341
Total Residential	$123,551
Commercial	$361,931
County Attorney Collections	42,978
Total Commercial	$404,909
TOTAL	$528,460
Alarm Business Fees	
License	$ 72,310
Civil Citations	17,750
Administrative Fees	8,332
TOTAL	$ 98,392
Appeal Filing Fees	
Residential	$ 555
Commercial	255
TOTAL	$ 810
GRAND TOTAL	$1,066,312

Regardless of where the revenue collected is deposited, include it as revenue generated from the alarm management program. For example, the registration and renewal fees may go into the general fund, while the civil citations fees may go directly to the courts. Absent your enforcement of the alarm ordinance, however, this revenue would not have been generated at all and you should get the credit.

Show your collection rate for the total monies billed. How much money is outstanding or delinquent for 30 days, 60 days or 90 days? Describe the mechanism utilized, if any, to collect outstanding or delinquent fees. If none exists, this may be an excellent way to show what could be possible if more resources were available.

Perhaps your municipality performs in-house collection efforts but you believe that using an outside collection firm would reap greater benefits or vice versa. This would be the place to justify a policy or procedure change.

Example – Calendar Year Billed vs. Collected False Alarm Response Fees

| False Alarm Response Fees	Billed	Collected	Past Due (>30 & <60 days overdue)	Delinquent (>50 days overdue)
Commercial	$426,450	$385,325	$30,875	$9,800
Residential	$97,550	$88,625	$3,475	$4,475
Total	$524,000	$473,950	$34,350	$14,575

Alternatively, if your alarm ordinance contains no sanctions for non-payment of fees/fines, you can use your annual report to demonstrate how initiating sanctions would increase collection efforts or even reduce the overall collection efforts that are necessary. For example, instituting non-response to alarm activations for non-payment provides a great incentive for alarm users to pay their bills.

Do the revenues collected cover the cost of administration of the program? If not, you can graphically show that an increase in fees is warranted. If they do, show how much additional revenue was collected to help offset the cost of patrol response.

Savings

It is also important to quantify the savings that your locality realized as a result of fewer public safety responses to alarms because of your alarm program. Include data for:

- Total dollars saved
- Total officer hours saved
- Total officer work years saved
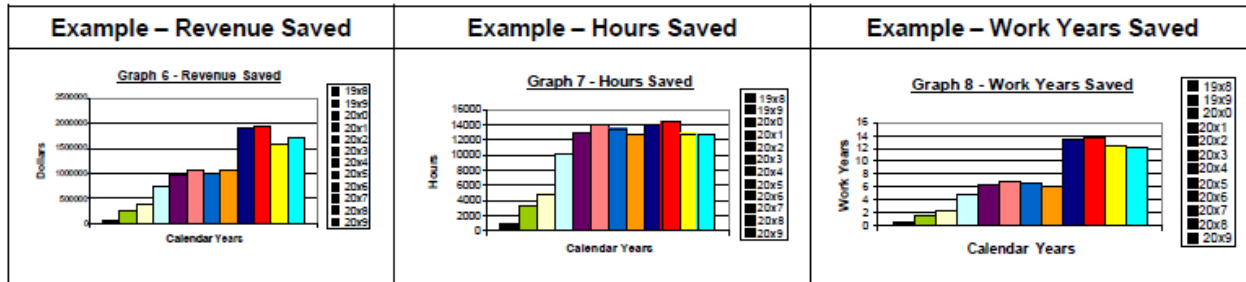
Follow these steps to determine your savings:

1. Determine the cost to your department for response to a false alarm activation. If you need assistance with this, consult the FARA "How to Calculate False Alarm Dispatch Statistics" guide. It contains information on common costs associated with response to alarms, including, but not limited to, salary and fringe for an officer; supervision; patrol car, gasoline and maintenance; and equipment (gun, bullets, handcuffs, etc.). If your department routinely sends two officers to every alarm call, be sure to double the costs.
2. Determine the average amount of time an officer spends responding to the site, investigating the activation and clearing the scene.
3. Finally, determine how many actual responses to false alarms were made by your officers during the time period covered in your report.

Once you have these statistics, you can then perform statistical analysis and provide data on savings.

Example to Determine Your Savings

For purposes of this example, assume that your agency received 20,000 requests for dispatch and actually responded to 12,000 of those calls. Also, assume that 500 of the responses were to actual verified events. It costs your department $90 per response per officer, and each officer spends approximately 20 minutes from dispatch to clearing the scene. A full work-year constitutes 2080 hours. However, officers are not on patrol 2080 hours in a year. Take into account vacation and sick time, training, court, roll-call, and anything else that takes officers away from patrol. Assume 1040 hours of patrol time per year. Your calculations under these circumstances are as follows:

20,000	Requests for Dispatch
12,000	Actual Responses
8,000	Sub-total: Non-Response to False Alarms
- 500	Verified Calls
7,500	Non-Responses to False Alarms x
90	Per Response Cost
$ 675,000	Savings
x 2	Second Officer
$1,350,000	**Total Savings**

In the example above, the $1,350,000 represents a savings to the department in not having to respond to 8,500 false alarm activations. (Do not include the 500 verified events as they do not represent responses to false alarms.)

Using the same assumptions made above, hourly and work year savings can be reflected as follows:

```
    7,500         Non-Responses
  x    20         Minutes Per Call
150,000
  ÷    60         Minutes Per Hour
    2,500         Hours Saved
  x     2         Two Officers Per Response
    5,000         Total Hours Saved
÷ 1,040           Work Hours Per Year
    4.807         Work Years Saved
```

In the example above, officers saved 5,000 hours of patrol response time and 4.807 work years in not having to respond to 7,500 false alarm activations. This equates to almost five full-time officers back on the street and available for patrol, community policing initiatives and homeland security issues.

Expenditures

Make sure to describe all the expenditures made to enforce and implement your alarm management program to provide the cost to your department and locality of false alarms.

Be sure to include any formulas used for calculating costs. This will help to allay confusion that may arise when readers do not understand the methodology utilized.

The main costs associated with alarm management units are personnel and the purchase or lease of tracking and billing software or employment of a third-party administrator. Generally, these costs are offset by the revenues received from registration/permit fees, false alarm response fees/fines, and the assessment of other fees or fines. It may take more than one year to recoup all of the start-up costs associated with your program.

- Other costs that must be budgeted for on an annual basis include, but are not limited to:
  - **Operating expenses** - postage, office supplies, telephones, printing/duplicating, office space
  - **Equipment** - computers (hardware and maintenance on software), printers, copier machines, auto mailing machines, typewriters, adding machines, fax machines
  - **Third-party administration** - contracted price, percentage of revenues generated
  - **Travel** - unit vehicle, fleet vehicle, gasoline, maintenance, air fares, hotel accommodations
  - **Training** - in-house, FARA, alarm industry, other

Major Accomplishments/New Initiatives

Including a section on major accomplishments or significant initiatives is an excellent way to highlight those projects you implemented that are not necessarily part of the mandates of your ordinance, but which still help to reduce false alarms. Major accomplishments may include, but are not limited to, such things as:

- Educating police officers and 9-1-1 staff, at in-service training and rookie classes, to teach them about the alarm ordinance and what they can do to help you help them
- Working one-on-one with specific alarm users, who have experienced a high number of false alarms
- Work with specific alarm companies to resolve problem accounts, to ensure compliance with the ordinance, or to develop and implement an alarm user awareness school
- Introducing or supporting legislation on a State level, such as Enhanced Call Verification, which assists all jurisdictions within the state to reduce alarm dispatch requests

- Help to defeat pre-emptive State legislation, which would negate your ability to enforce your local ordinance
- Establishing good working relationships with state and local alarm industry associations and individual alarm companies, and develop united strategies to reduce false alarms
- Placing telephone calls to alarm users, who have false alarms, to determine the cause and suggest corrective action
- Developing and implementing community outreach programs to highlight false alarms and their impact on public safety, the alarm industry, the alarm user and the community at large
- Initiating innovative enforcement efforts
- Purchasing or enhancing false alarm tracking and billing software
- Any awards or meritorious service citations for your unit and individual staff

Professional certification is very important to most public safety agencies. As such, provide information in your annual report about any professional certifications attained by unit staff. This may include FARA Professional Certification, public safety continuing education courses, alarm industry technical training and certification, computer science and/or information systems certification, and other staff improvements.

Ordinance Implementation and Review

You may also wish to include a section on ordinance implementation and review. If your alarm management program is new, you can describe the steps undertaken to get started and what you plan to accomplish in the next year. If your program is not new, you can still include data on implementation over a period time and how the program has progressed. This is also a great place to list any possible amendments you believe are necessary, as a result of your ordinance implementation and review, to ensure success and further reduce false alarms. For all of the major accomplishments listed in your annual report, be sure to include narrative on what you did, how you did it, and what the results were.

Public Relations

Positive press, whether it be in print, web or on-air media, will be greatly appreciated by both the Executive and Legislative branches of government, as well as your superiors. Every effort should be taken to formulate working relationships with the press and to feed them regular stories on the alarm management program and successfully implemented initiatives. Most public safety agencies have media departments, which are more than happy to help you with press releases and public information spots on local television. If your agency does not have a media department, try to develop relationships on your own. Utilize all avenues available, including, but not limited to:

- Newspaper – regional and local
- Radio
- Television
- Public Safety Journals
- Alarm Industry Trade Magazines
- Public Safety, Alarm Industry, and Community Newsletters
- Public Safety Trade Magazines
- Internet - YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Future Plans

Some annual reports include information on the unit's plans for the future. Be aware, however, that if you include this kind of information, command staff may expect you to accomplish all of the initiatives. If you are unable to, for whatever reason, be prepared to explain why not. On the other hand, if you want to institute new initiatives, but do not have the staff to accomplish the tasks, this may be a good way to highlight what could be possible if additional staff were obtained.

What Do You Do With the Report When It Is Done

To get the full impact from your annual report, people have to read it. For people to read it, they have to know about it and where to get it. To get the word out, consider the following. Post it on your web site, send it to your superiors and, with their approval, send it to the elected leaders. Write a press release about your significant accomplishments or conclusions, and send your annual report as support material with the release. Convert it to a PowerPoint Presentation and use it to brief industry or community leaders on trends. In short, use your creativity to tout your program and its impact.

Writing annual reports provides you with a mechanism to reinforce with elected and appointed leaders in your locality, the general public and the alarm industry what you accomplished over the past year and where you may need assistance, if at all. You can include as much or as little as you believe is warranted or is requested. While gathering statistical data and committing to paper everything you have done over a full year's time can be a daunting task, the benefits you will reap far outweigh what you have to go through to put the report together. Just remember, if you don't promote your unit, your staff and yourself, no one else will either!

FARA (logo)	**False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency**
	Chapter 12
	Conclusion

Implementing a successful false alarm reduction program will not be easy. However, the rewards are remarkable and certainly make the pain worth it in the end.

Remember, FARA is available to help you all along the way. If you get frustrated, just contact us and we will help any way we can.

For More Information Contact:

For more information on this topic or other matters related to alarm management, please contact FARA.

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