

# **FALSE ALARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES WHITE PAPER**

Produced by the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA)

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## Introduction

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The False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) has authored this White Paper to outline the strategies employed by local governments in alarm management.

Regardless of which option or combination of options are chosen, FARA stands ready to assist you in creating and implementing an effective alarm management program.

Critical to the creation, implementation and enforcement of a successful alarm management program is to get all stakeholders involved early in the process. Open lines of communication among public safety, alarm industry, and alarm users can have a positive influence on designing a well-crafted program in which all stakeholders take ownership.

Twenty-one strategies that are commonly used throughout North America for reducing false burglar 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.

## Develop a Successful Strategy

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The most significant results in alarm management have been obtained by employing common steps. The following are key areas to consider when evaluating current or future strategies.

- Local factors including, but not limited to, demographics, economics, political climate, size and costs.
- Thorough investigation and evaluation of all known possible false alarm management methods.
- Consistent and regular review of effectiveness based on individual operations and what the jurisdiction finds works successfully and what does not.
- Provision of adequate staff or outsourcing to administer the program.
- Inclusion of appropriate representatives from at least the following constituencies in developing the local program:
  - Public safety
  - Legislators
  - Finance Office
  - Neighborhood Watch
  - Citizens
  - Business Community
  - Alarm Industry/Association
  - Homeowners Association

A process that encourages all the parties to take ownership.

## Determine Goals

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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 safety and morale of the patrol 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.

## Common Strategies

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The most successful alarm management programs have combined several of the following twenty strategies to form a local program. Each of these twenty-one strategies has advantages and disadvantages suggested on the following pages. Each municipality must select the proper combination of these strategies to achieve the desired impact.

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. ASAP to PSAP Protocol
9. Education
10. Alarm User Awareness Schools
11. Public safety Outreach
12. Private or Verified Response
13. Billing Alarm Monitoring Companies for Fees and Fines
14. Alarm Management Outsourcing
15. Broadcast and File
16. Alarm Business Licensing
17. Installation/Manufacturing Standards
18. Criminal Sanctions
19. Acclimation Period
20. Publish Alarm Company Dispatch Rates
21. Cancel 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

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Many localities have an existing ordinance that could provide the necessary tools to reduce false alarms, but 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***

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- Allows the jurisdiction to begin managing false alarms without waiting to complete the sometimes-lengthy process of adopting or amending an ordinance.
- Allows for positive communication 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***

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

### 2. Permitting or Registration

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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.

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### **Advantages**

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- 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**

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- 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**

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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**

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- 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.
- Charging a registration fee reinforces the value of the registration. Alarm users are more likely to register their system if the requirement is reinforced with a fee, which results in more accurate contact information for the alarmed premises and alarm user.

### **Disadvantages**

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- 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**

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

### **Advantages**

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- 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**

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- 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**

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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***

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- 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***

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- 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)**

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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***

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- 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***

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

## **7. Other Monitoring Center Verification**

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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.
- Text Verification – the alarm company sends a text message to all responsible parties on the call list in hopes someone is on site and can confirm if there is an actual emergency, or if it is a false alarm.
- 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.

[The Monitoring Association](#) (TMA) has created a standard (AVS-01) which utilizes a scale system which indicates the urgency of a burglary alarm to the dispatching agency based on information the monitoring company has gathered using the above methods of verification.

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.

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### **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.

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### **Disadvantages**

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

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## **8. ASAP to PSAP Protocol**

ASAP to PSAP stands for Automated Secure Alarm Protocol to Public Safety Answering Point. This protocol allows alarm monitoring centers to submit calls for service electronically versus a manual phone call. The request is sent through the existing CAD system and contains all pertinent information including the address, type of building, owner name, alarm type(s) and times posted, zoning information, alarm owner name and phone number, alarm company name and phone number, and permit/licensing information at a minimum. Additional information or updates may be provided by the alarm company or requested by an Emergency Communications Center (ECC) via an instant chat feature through ASAP, even after the alarm is closed. Public safety agencies interested in this service should reach out to [The Monitoring Association](#) (TMA).

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### **Advantages**

- Decreases the amount of time spent on each dispatch request for both public safety and alarm monitoring companies.
- Reduces call volume in and out of the ECC.
- Reduces stress for ECC call takers.
- Address validations are performed automatically on new accounts.
- Eliminates data errors caused by misreading/mishearing information in verbal communication.

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### **Disadvantages**

- The implementation process may be lengthy.
- ASAP capability must be approved at the state level, and then must be available within your CAD system.
- May require an update to your CAD system, and/or an implementation consultant, which could incur an additional cost.

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## **9. 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 taxpayers. The training may also include information on the effects of false alarms on public safety, and discussion of officer safety issues.

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### **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.

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### **Disadvantages**

- Requires public safety time and resources.

## 10. Alarm User Awareness Schools

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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 result in a false activation, 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.

To obtain more information on this subject, review a copy of the FARA manual "How to Create an Alarm User Awareness School."

### **Advantages**

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- The re-offending 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**

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- Requires public safety time and resources.

## 11. Public Safety Outreach

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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**

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- 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**

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- Requires public safety time and resources.

## 12. Private or Verified Response

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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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

## **13. Billing Alarm Monitoring Companies for Fees and Fines**

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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.

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### **Advantages**

- 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.

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### **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.



## 14. Alarm Management Outsourcing

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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**

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- 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**

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- 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.

## 15. Broadcast and File

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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**

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- 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**

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- 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.

## 16. Alarm Business Licensing

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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**

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- 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**

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- 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.

## **17. Installation/Manufacturing Standards**

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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, they may be 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**

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- 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**

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- 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.

## 18. Criminal Sanctions

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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.

### **Advantages**

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- 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**

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- 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.

## 19. Acclimation Period

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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**

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- 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.
- Provides a period in which the equipment can operate to determine if there are any bugs or malfunctioning/defective components that need to 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**

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- 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.

## 20. Dispatch Rates

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A dispatch rate is the number of requests for dispatch made by an alarm company divided by its registered users in a given jurisdiction. In order to entice an alarm company to improve their dispatch rate, a municipality could publish dispatch rates to the alarm company or the general public. This may be appropriate in a community where other avenues have been attempted at false alarm reduction, but the results are not effective.

It is suggested that the alarm companies are advised in advance that publishing will take place and provided with a courtesy copy of the dispatch list before it is published. If there are any errors this will provide an opportunity to correct the list before any inaccurate information is published.

As an alternative, a municipality could send a “top offenders” list directly to an alarm company so they may address alarm users who may require service or additional training.

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### **Advantages**

- Some municipalities have found this method has driven alarm companies to correct underlying issues causing a high number of false alarms.

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### **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.

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## **21. Cancel 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.

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### **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.

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### **Disadvantages**

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

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## **Additional FARA Resources**

More in-depth information on many of the strategies discussed in this White Paper is available in the following FARA publications:

- False Alarm Reduction Program for YOUR Agency
- How to Create an Alarm User Awareness School
- FARA Model Alarm Ordinance
- FARA Guide to Alarm Ordinances
- FARA Model Fee Resolution
- Enhanced Call Verification Presentation

## **Conclusion**

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Successful alarm management programs are enacted and implemented every day. When considering the provisions of your program, be sure to understand the impact each provision will have on the ultimate administration and enforcement of the program. If the program is too administratively burdensome, the likelihood of success diminishes.

Additionally, understand that a well-crafted alarm management program will clearly define the responsibilities of public safety, alarm industry and alarm users. It will contain an enforcement mechanism, which is applied fairly to all, and seeks to hold alarm abusers accountable while having a minimal impact on those who responsibly use, install and service alarm systems.

While the most common strategies are listed in this False Alarm Reduction Strategies White Paper, there may be other successful methods that are not as widely known. Carefully research all options and decide which method(s) best suits the needs of your community, legislators and public safety.

## **For More Information Contact:**

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

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