

Unwanted Fire Signals Strategy

February 2010



GREATER MANCHESTER
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Document Version Control

Issue No	Date
1.0	8/2/2010
2.0	28/2/2010 Following ACFO comments
3.0	
4.0	
5.0	
6.0	
7.0	
8.0	

Approval Agency:

Strategy Sponsor: ACFO (Fire safety)

This Strategy was originally approved in:

This Strategy was reviewed in:

Next review date:

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Approximately 25% of all incidents attended by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service result from fire alarms in buildings. Of these 95.35% are not fires and of those that are defined as fires only 0.37% required the use of equipment to extinguish the fire. This is a significant burden on the finite resources of the Service.
- 1.2 Furthermore, false alarms disrupt business and communities, causing unnecessary distress and economic loss. They also increase the risk of accidents or injuries to fire fighters and other road users when vehicles are responding under emergency conditions.
- 1.3 This Strategy provides a description of Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority's approach to reducing the occurrence of and impact from unwanted fire signals. It outlines what is already a matter of common practice and what it intends to progress in the future.
- 1.4 The Strategy is set to deliver against the following Fire and Rescue Authority objectives in the first instance:
 - *PRO5: To ensure working practices, resources, systems and procedures are appropriate, flexible and meet all of our legal requirements both now and in the future.*
 - *FIN4: To develop innovative and efficient approaches that result in economic benefits without compromising the quality of service delivery.*
- 1.5 The approaches outlined in this strategy are intended to promote best practice in the provision, management and maintenance of fire alarm and detection systems and to help ensure that any mobilisations to fire alarms are necessary, and involve the appropriate weight and speed of response.
- 1.6 This strategy outlines what is needed to provide value for money by ensuring that people and the built environment remain protected whilst Fire and Rescue Service resources are released to deliver against other priorities. By preventing the unnecessary movement of fire appliances, this strategy will also help reduce our carbon footprint in support of our drive to be sustainable in everything that we do.
- 1.7 It is the responsibility of all Community Safety, Operational and Fire Safety Enforcement staff to support the delivery of this strategy.

- 1.8 National guidance is available on how to reduce unwanted fire signals from the Chief Fire Officer's Association¹. Policies and procedures subsequent to this strategy will incorporate many aspects of this guidance.

2. Definitions for the Purposes of this Strategy

- 2.1 Fire Alarm: is an electrical or other system provided in a building that provides warning to the occupants that the evacuation strategy for the building should be implemented whilst the cause of the alarm should be investigated. It is not intended as a means to ensure the attendance of the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.2 Unwanted Fire Signal: is where a fire alarm system has operated because of a false alarm and resulted in the unnecessary mobilisation of Fire and Rescue Service resources.
- 2.3 Remotely Monitored Fire Alarm System: is a fire alarm system in a building that is monitored remotely from the premises, by a company whose purpose is to identify when the alarm has operated and where necessary, pass an emergency call to the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.4 Alarm Receiving Centre: is a company that remotely monitors fire alarm systems and where necessary pass an emergency call to the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.5 Call Back: is a process applied by Alarm Receiving Centres whereby they contact buildings where the fire alarm has operated to confirm whether there is a fire before passing an emergency call to the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.6 Call Challenge: is a process applied by Fire and Rescue Service Control staff to determine whether a fire alarm has operated due to a fire and on a risk basis, what resources require mobilising.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This strategy applies to unwanted fire signals emanating from all premises other than traditional low rise dwellings.

¹ Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) *Policy for the Reduction of False Alarms and Unwanted Fire Signals*: http://www.cfoa.org.uk/10038?not_logged_in=true

- 3.2 It is recognised that as the number of fire detection and monitoring systems in traditional low rise dwellings increases, this may lead to an increase in their impact on the Service in the future. This will be monitored and consideration given to incorporating them into this strategy at a later date.
- 3.3 The strategy has two distinct goals each of which requires different approaches:
- Firstly, to improve the design, installation, management and maintenance of fire alarm and detection systems in buildings to prevent false alarms from happening.
 - Secondly, to prevent the unnecessary mobilisation of Fire and Rescue Service resources to calls originating from fire alarm and detection systems that are false alarms.

4. **Improving Design, Installation, Management and Maintenance of Fire Alarm and Detection Systems**

- 4.1 Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service will promote and support the effective design, installation, management and maintenance of fire alarm and detection systems by:
- The use of targeted marketing
 - Encouraging the use of third party accredited system designers, installers and commissioners
 - Only requiring the installation of a fire alarm with a detection system where other means of raising an alarm would be unsuitable or insufficient
 - Working with those responsible for buildings to ensure that where a fire alarm and detection system is installed or is to be installed, it utilises the most appropriate devices to reduce false alarms
 - Informing those responsible for buildings of the need to investigate the cause of an alarm before passing an emergency call to the Fire and Rescue Service
 - Encouraging those responsible for the management of medium and high rise apartment buildings to introduce monitoring arrangements that enable a fire alarm signal to be verified before passing an emergency call to the Fire and Rescue Service.

- Educating those responsible for buildings about how to investigate when their fire alarm has operated
- Monitoring the performance of fire alarm systems to determine those premises where the fire alarm and detection system is not being adequately managed or maintained
- Taking proportionate enforcement action where those responsible for premises fail to manage or maintain their fire alarm and detection system

5. Preventing Unnecessary Mobilisations

5.1 Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service will seek to prevent unnecessary mobilisations by:

- Recommending or where possible, requiring Alarm Receiving Centres to apply Call Back to buildings where the fire alarm has operated, in order to confirm whether there is a fire before passing an emergency call to the Fire and Rescue Service
- Requesting or where possible, requiring Alarm Receiving Centres to provide data showing the number of times fire alarm and detection systems have operated and the number of times that Call Back has been applied
- Applying Call Challenge to all calls to fire alarms received via the 999 system in accordance with defined policy
- Educating those responsible for buildings that the primary reason a fire alarm is installed is to ensure that those occupying the building are safely evacuated; not as a means to ensure the attendance of the Fire and Rescue Service
- Encouraging those responsible for buildings to disconnect any link to an Alarm Receiving Centre during periods when the building is occupied

6 Mobilisation of Resources

6.1 We will attend all calls arising from fire alarm systems where our Call Challenge process has determined that an attendance is necessary, or where a caller has been unable to provide sufficient information to enable Control staff to decide that we will not attend.

- 6.2 Despite the efforts of the Fire and Rescue Service and businesses, unwanted fire signals may still occur. In order to minimise their impact, when responding to fire alarm signals without confirmation that there is a fire, we will seek to limit the weight and speed of response.
- 6.3 A pre-determined attendance of a single fire appliance will be sent to all UwFS, except where the operational risk is considered to be so high that additional fire appliances are required. Where evidence suggests that consideration should be given to reducing this approach in the future, all relevant stakeholders will be consulted before any changes are made.
- 6.4 The speed of response will be determined following a dynamic risk assessment made by the responding personnel. This will take into account the dangers posed to other road users by making an emergency attendance. As a result, fire appliances may attend without using blue lights and sirens and comply with all requirements of the Road Traffic Regulations en-route.

7 Engaging Those Responsible for Fire Alarm Systems

- 7.1 Before implementing changes in our approach to the way we deal with unwanted fire signals the Fire and Rescue Service will take proportionate steps to engage with those responsible for fire alarm systems.

8. Equality and Diversity

- 8.1 In addressing the problem of unwanted fire signals, all our policies, procedures and actions will take account of cultural diversity to ensure that our services are delivered equitably.

9 Training and Development

- 9.1 Staff responsible for carrying this strategy into effect will receive appropriate training, coaching/mentoring and support commensurate with their responsibilities.