



THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION POLICY ON MANAGING FALSE ALARMS

DEFINITION

With the introduction of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 and in an effort to unify all new Fire Authorities, the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) has introduced its guideline policy for the management of false alarms.



Overview

In 2004, the Fire and Rescue Services (F&RS) responded to 282,000 false alarms from automatic fire detection systems, that equates to over 25% of all calls made to the Fire Service. It is estimated that up to 98% of the responses made by the F&RS require no fire fighting action at the scene. The impact on the F&RS of responding to this number of false alarms is significant and includes the considerable drain on resources, both financially and in terms of time lost.

The CFOA policy requires all non-domestic systems with automatic fire station links to be registered within 3 years. As this policy varies slightly from Authority to Authority, it is recommended that all owner-occupiers check with their local authority to understand what policy has been adopted.

What it will mean to owners and occupiers

Irrespective of whether the Fire Authority chooses to adopt the CFOA policy or an alternative scheme, all owner-occupiers will need to understand how these new procedures affect future response to their automatic fire signals, as it may impact insurance policies.

The CFOA policy recommends the registration of all FD&A systems in the form of an agreement, which will provide each property with a unique reference number (URN). This will cost around £35 and will be automatically registered after the first false alarm. Each building will have an acceptable performance level based on the number of false alarms received and the number of detectors installed. This will determine the level of response:

- Level 1 – Full response
- Level 2 – Response driven at normal road conditions
- Level 3 – No response unless supported by a follow up 999 call

If the number of false alarms exceeds the agreed threshold, the response level may be downgraded until improvements are enforced and maintained. If no improvement is made on a level 3 response then the Fire and Rescue Service may withdraw the URN. Each owner-occupier will also need to contact their insurance company to check the effect of these response levels on their policies.



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The CFOA process for applying for a URN will be as follows:

- The user should contact the local Fire and Rescue Service to obtain an application form
- Once completed the application should be returned with a site risk assessment
- The Fire and Rescue Service will process the application, agree a response level and issue the URN to both the user and maintainer



THE AIMS OF THE CFOA POLICY ARE:

- From 1st April 2007, all systems with URNs must be maintained by a third party certificated company
- From 1st April 2008, all new systems must be designed, installed, commissioned and maintained by a third party certificated company

Recognised certifications: BAFE SP203 or LPS1014.

Further information

The full transcript of the Chief Fire Officers Association Model Agreement is available from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or from the Stationery Office.

SUMMARY

- Check with your local fire and rescue authority to understand their false alarm management policy
- Be sure that your chosen FD&A supplier is working towards or already has 3rd party accreditation for the design, installation, commissioning or maintenance of your fire alarm system

NORTHERN REGION

David Coburn
Northern Area Sales Manager
07917 594356
david.coburn@honeywell.com

SOUTHERN REGION

David Slater
Southern Area Sales Manager
07768 541 022
david.slater@honeywell.com

