

False Alarm Reduction Strategies

White Paper

**Produced by the
False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA)**

May not be reproduced without the expressed, written consent of FARA.

False Alarm Reduction Strategies White Paper

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Path to Best Results	Page 2
Determining Goals	Page 2
We Are Here to Help	Page 3
Executive Summary	Page 3
Strategies	
1. Implement Existing Ordinance	Page 4
2. Permitting & Registration	Page 5
3. Registration Fees	Page 5
4. Fees or Fines for Abusers	Page 5
5. Restricted Response	Page 6
6. Verification	Page 6
7. Enhanced Telephonic Verification	Page 7
8. Education	Page 7
9. Private or Verified Response	Page 8
10. Law Enforcement Contact with Abusers	Page 8
11. Alarm Company Collection	Page 9
12. Outsourcing	Page 9
13. Broadcast and File	Page 10
14. Alarm Business Licensing	Page 10
15. Installation/Manufacturing Standards	Page 11
16. Criminal Sanctions	Page 12
17. Alarm Awareness Schools	Page 12
18. Soak Period	Page 13
19. Publish Alarm Business Dispatch Rates	Page 13
20. Cancellation	Page 14
End Note	Page 14

Introduction

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

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.

Path to Best Results

The most significant results have been obtained by employing common steps.

1. Consideration of local factors including, but, not limited to, demographics, economics, political climate, size and costs.
2. Thorough investigation and evaluation of all known possible methods.
3. Consistent and regular review of effectiveness based on individual operations and what the jurisdiction finds works successfully and what does not.
4. Provision of adequate staff to administer the program.
5. Inclusion of appropriate representatives from at least the following constituencies in developing the local program:
 - Law Enforcement,
 - Legislators
 - Alarm Industry
 - Citizens
 - Business Community
6. A process that all of the parties can take ownership in.

Determining Goals

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.
- Improving the morale and safety of the patrol officer.
- Cost recovery.
- Minimize the impact on responsible users.
- Minimizing the administrative burden on the locality and department.
- Changing the behavior of the alarm company and its personnel.
- Changing the behavior of the alarm user.
- Continuing the effectiveness of responsibly used alarm systems.

We Are Here to Help!

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.

FARA and NBFAA have co-authored a comprehensive model burglar alarm ordinance. It provides a base framework from which law enforcement and the alarm industry may work, should a municipality elect to pass an ordinance or enact a policy regarding false alarm reduction.

For more in-depth information on false alarm ordinances, please refer to the NBFAA/FARA Model Burglar Alarm Ordinance and the FARA's manual entitled, "How to Develop and Implement a False Alarm Reduction Program."

Executive Summary

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

21. **Implement Existing Ordinance**- Many localities have an ordinance on the books to manage false alarms which is not enforced. Perhaps it can be modified with minor amendments to serve the needs of the jurisdiction.
22. **Permitting & Registration**- Most localities require permitting or registering of all alarm users.
23. **Registration Fees**- Many jurisdictions charge a nominal fee for registration to help defray processing costs. Others charge a fee designed to offset some response costs.
24. **Fees or Fines for Abusers**- Some localities impose fees or fines for excessive false alarms. The point when fees begin to be levied varies.
25. **Restricted Response - Internal Suspension Policy**- 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.
26. **Verification**- An alarm company should be encouraged or required (via the ordinance) to attempt to verify each alarm signal prior to requesting law enforcement dispatch to determine if there is a real need for response. Several methods exist to perform verification, including; Telephone Verification, Cross Zoning, Two Way Voice and Video Verification.
27. **Enhanced Telephonic Verification**- The alarm company calls the alarm site immediately after the alarm is received but before law enforcement dispatch is requested. If the user answers and indicates an error, and verifies his/her identity, no dispatch is requested. If the user is not reached on the first call, a second call is made to another responsible party or owner at a different telephone number when the first call does not succeed.
28. **Education**- A critical component of any false alarm reduction program is education of alarm users, alarm companies and monitoring services, encouraging each to accept their responsibility for proper system use and installation and the reduction of false alarms.
29. **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 law enforcement dispatch. This method usually applies only to burglar alarms and exempts human activated alarms such as robbery, duress and panic from the verification process.
30. **Law Enforcement Contact with Abusers**- This method includes: required or voluntary meetings facilitated by law enforcement with the alarm user and the alarm company to identify and solve an alarm problem, follow-up visits by patrol or alarm unit officers to problem sites, assigning officers to the alarm unit who receive technical training and inspect problem systems in order to suggest or require changes and follow-up phone calls from the alarm unit to problem sites.

31. **Alarm Company Collection-** This option requires the alarm monitoring company to collect any false alarm fees/fines that are imposed.
32. **Outsourcing-** The local municipality or law enforcement agency contracts with a private business entity to track and bill for false alarms and/or permit/registration. The local law enforcement officers still respond to the alarm signal activation.
33. **Broadcast and File-** The 9-1-1 operators announce the alarm address over the police 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.
34. **Alarm Business Licensing-** Alarm company licensing or registration can mandate that alarm companies and/or certain employees of the alarm company meet certain requirements. Requiring the business license number on the permit or registration form helps to monitor unlicensed activity.
35. **Installation/Manufacturing Standards-** Many jurisdictions have had success by mandating periodic inspection and/or upgrade of alarm systems to meet certain minimum installation standards.
36. **Criminal Sanctions-** Criminal sanctions can be used for those alarm users or alarm companies who ignore the civil enforcement penalties.
37. **Alarm 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.
38. **Soak Period-** A soak period is a specific period of time after an alarm system has been activated where the alarm monitoring company does not request police dispatch when an alarm signal is received.
39. **Publish Alarm Business 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.
40. **Cancellation-** An alarm company is given an opportunity or is required (via an ordinance) to cancel a dispatch when it is determined that the alarm activation is a false alarm.

The preceding summary gives an overview of the various strategies used to reduce false alarms. Please read on to discover more details about each option along with the advantages and disadvantages of each.

1. Implement Existing Ordinance

Many localities have an ordinance on the books to govern alarm management which is not enforced. The existing ordinance may have the tools needed to attack the false alarm problem. Perhaps what is needed for a successful program is the proper commitment of staff and resources to implement and enforce the existing ordinance. Or, it can be modified with minor amendments to 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.

Disadvantages

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

2. Permitting & Registration

Most localities require permitting or registering of all alarm users. Registration periods generally vary from one time only at the time of system activation to three (3) 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 users attention on the problem.

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 if proper policies and safeguards are not in place.

3. Registration Fees

Many jurisdictions charge a nominal fee for registration to help defray processing costs. Others charge a fee designed to offset some response costs.

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. E.g. If it is estimated that an alarm user base is 30,000 and that is multiplied by a nominal fee of \$30.00 per registration, it will provide \$900,000 to use for start-up costs.
- In order for something to have meaning, it must have a value. If registration is free, there is no value to the alarm user, and it may be very difficult to get them to understand the importance of avoiding false alarms and responsible alarm usage or to register their alarm systems.

Disadvantages

- Requires a manual or computerized process to obtain and track the fees.
- Fee can encounter citizen and political resistance.

4. Fees or Fines for Abusers

Some localities impose fees or fines for excessive false alarms. The point when fees begin to be levied varies. Consult the NBFAR/FARA Model Burglar Alarm Ordinance for more information. Escalating fees seem to have a greater impact on the reduction of false alarms than fee ranges or one flat fee.

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 generate substantial revenues for the municipality.

Disadvantages

- If fees are not significant enough to the user, the user may budget for them and avoid changing their behavior.
- Requires a manual or computerized process to obtain and track the fees.
- Fee can encounter citizen and political resistance.

5. Restricted Response - Internal Suspension Policy

Some jurisdictions may allow law enforcement to deny police response to an alarm activation 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 police service prior to duration of the suspension period.

Advantages

- Provides a means to encourage a behavior change in the alarm user or to obtain compliance with the ordinance.
- Provides a 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 register their system.
- 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. Verification

An alarm company should be encouraged or required (via the ordinance) to attempt to verify each alarm signal prior to requesting law enforcement 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 law enforcement dispatch is requested. If the user answers and indicates an error, and verifies his/her identity, no dispatch is requested.
- Cross Zoning- Alarm equipment can be configured to require one or more of the following before a dispatch is requested:
 - Activation of multiple zones (two or more sensors in a site).
 - Activation of a perimeter sensor first and then an interior activation.
- 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 silent duress or hold-up alarms. Most law enforcement agencies make some distinction between duress/hold-up 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 law enforcement has been dispatched.

Advantages

- If alarm companies are required to filter out those alarm signals known to be false, law enforcement will be required to respond to fewer false alarms.

Disadvantages

- Enforcement is difficult. It is difficult to monitor that each alarm company is calling the site before requesting law enforcement dispatch.

7. Enhanced Telephonic Verification

With telephone verification, the alarm company calls the alarm site immediately after the alarm is received but before law enforcement dispatch is requested. If the user answers, indicates an error, and verifies his/her identity, no dispatch is requested.

There are several alarm system providers that make a second call 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.

Advantages

- Can result in significant reduction of dispatch requests.

Disadvantages

- Can delay the time between activation and a request for dispatch.
- Enforcement is difficult. It is hard to monitor that each alarm company is following the procedures or configuring the systems according to guidelines before requesting law enforcement dispatch.

8. Education

A critical component of any false alarm reduction program is education of alarm users, alarm companies and monitoring services, encouraging each to accept their responsibility for proper system use and installation and the reduction of false alarms.

This method involves considerable "hands-on" personal contact with alarm users, alarm companies and the community. Classes or meetings may be held with businesses or neighborhood groups, as well as one-on-one with alarm users and alarm businesses to bring both parties together. Meetings may cover use of equipment, design and system false alarm problems, the cost of false alarms to tax payers and may also include information on the effects of false alarms on law enforcement, costs to the municipality, discussion of officer safety issues, and may also include information on specific alarm users.

Advantages

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

Disadvantages

- Requires law enforcement time and resources.

9. 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 law enforcement dispatch. This method usually applies only to burglar alarms and exempts human activated alarms such as robbery, 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 law enforcement 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 law enforcement authority when the alarm system activates, the monitoring company will contact the local guard company requesting response. Upon verification that criminal activity either is occurring or has occurred at the alarm site, law enforcement officers are dispatched.

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 your municipality. Security guards 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 police in regards to crime scene containment.

Advantages

- Rapidly and significantly reduces the number of requests for police response.
- Diminishes the need for an alarm management unit in the department.
- Eliminates or reduces the administrative burden on the department.

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.
- Can increase the cost of the alarm system for the alarm company and the alarm user.
- May deny any response to those who cannot afford to pay for private response.
- Possibility of litigation and subsequent financial penalties to the locality if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss.

10. Law Enforcement Contact with Abusers

Several jurisdictions have had success with required or voluntary meetings facilitated by law enforcement 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 law enforcement time and resources.

11. Alarm Company Collection

This option requires the alarm monitoring company to collect any false alarm fees/fines that are imposed. One jurisdiction requires the alarm monitoring company operator to provide the monitoring center's pre-assigned number and the registration number of the alarm user to the police 9-1-1 operators when reporting an alarm signal activation.

Police respond to an intrusion alarm signal when the following conditions have been met:

- The premise is not under suspension of police response to an alarm signal.
- The central monitoring station is not under suspension for nonpayment of fines.

The monitoring company is then billed monthly or quarterly for their company alarm calls for service and is then required to collect those fees from the alarm user. If the alarm should prove to be a valid alarm, the false alarm charge is dismissed.

Advantages

- Provides an incentive to the alarm user to operate the system properly
- Provides an incentive to the alarm user and the alarm company 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 effective, to deal with several hundred alarm companies than it is to deal with several thousand alarm users.

Disadvantages

- Gets a private company involved in collecting a fee on behalf of the government.
- Creates the possibility for problems if fees are billed by the company and not forwarded.
- Can be inequitable if an individual user is denied response because their alarm company is delinquent on payments.
- Administrative burden is not eliminated because alarm unit retains need to collect fees from each alarm monitoring company.
- Can increase the cost of the alarm system for the alarm company and the alarm user.
- Enforcement of fee collection on alarm monitoring companies located outside the jurisdiction and/or the state can be difficult.
- Possibility of litigation and subsequent financial penalties to the locality if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss.

12. Outsourcing

In this approach, the local municipality or law enforcement agency contracts with a private business entity to track and bill for false alarms and/or permit/registration. The local law enforcement 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 law enforcement 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.

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.

13. Broadcast and File

This policy has the 9-1-1 operators announce an alarm activation and the alarm address over the police 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 police response.
- Better than non-response because the criminal is unaware of which requests will receive response.
- 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 law enforcement with free coffee?
- Possibility of litigation and subsequent financial penalties to the locality if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss.
- Possibility of more crime if criminals perceive police rarely respond to alarm systems.

14. 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, etc.).
- Requirements for criminal history background 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.

Advantages

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

15. 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 police 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 law enforcement, require that all systems be zoned and that the specific zone that activated be relayed to 9-1-1 personnel when requesting dispatch.

Specify the minimum gauge wire to be used, mandate battery back up, require dual technology 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 NBFAR/FARA Model Burglar 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.

16. 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.

Advantages

- Provides a mechanism to address those alarm users, who do not pay the civil assessments and continue to burden the police department 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 police officer for the departmental report, search warrants (if needed), submission to the prosecutor’s office, and testimony in court.
- A municipality’s court system may not willingly accept the burden of prosecuting these cases which will lead to inconsistent or non existent enforcement.

17. Alarm 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 law enforcement resources.

Most 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 law enforcement are equally concerned about false alarms and each are taking a proactive step to deal with the issue.

Attendance at 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/NBFAA manual “How to Create an Alarm Awareness School.”

Advantages

- The recidivism rate among alarm users who attend an alarm awareness school is extremely low.
- Provides the alarm user and the alarm company with a firm foundation to avoid false alarms.
- Is consistent with “community policing” programs putting department personnel in the community helping alarm users to solve a problem.

Disadvantages

- Requires law enforcement time and resources.

18. Soak Period

A soak period is a specific period of time after an alarm system has been installed where the alarm monitoring company does not request police dispatch when an alarm activates. Providing in an ordinance for a mandatory soak period allows new alarm users to make mistakes without burdening law enforcement or incurring false alarm response fees. The soak period can be for any period of time deemed reasonable. The most common soak periods are between 5 - 10 days.

Advantages

- As with any new piece of electronic equipment, mistakes will happen, either by the alarm user or by the equipment itself. The soak 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 law enforcement and the alarm user.
- Adoption of this policy creates no administrative burden on the department.

Disadvantages

- Alarm users may be denied response during the "soak period".
- Possibility of litigation and subsequent financial penalties to the locality if an alarm site that does not receive response suffers a loss.

19. Publish Alarm Business 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; i.e., only the top ten best/worst, every alarm company/monitoring station doing business in you're the municipality, only those companies with x number of customers, etc.

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. Cancellation

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 law enforcement call-taker/dispatcher's identification number, which would be entered on the call when the alarm company requests 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. Law enforcement can be certain that if the cancellation code is given, that the alarm company has determined the alarm activation to be false.

Advantages

- Clearly, if alarm companies are required to filter out those alarm signals known to be false, law enforcement will be required to respond to fewer false alarms.

Disadvantages

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

End Note

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 law enforcement. For further assistance in developing and/or implementing false alarm reduction strategies, please contact FARA at (301) 519-9237.