

FALSE ALARMS POLICY

Introduction

Section 47C(4) of the Fire Service Act 1975 authorises the New Zealand Fire Service (on behalf of the New Zealand Fire Service Commission) to charge for the attendance of any brigade at an incident, where the reason for that attendance was the receipt of a false alarm of fire.

The New Zealand Fire Service (Fire Service) has made reducing the number of unwanted calls from both direct-connected and non-connected fire alarm systems a high priority goal. In recent years, False Alarms have accounted for over 37% of all incidents attended by the NZFS and the attendance at these incidents result in a real cost to the NZFS.

In trying to eliminate all false alarms from fire alarm systems it is not the intention to discourage or stop genuine calls for assistance. Whilst the occasional unwanted alarm from a fire alarm system is perhaps inevitable, repeated false alarms are avoidable.

The Fire Service approach is to use the range of 'encourage, educate, engineer, and finally enforce' principles to reduce these false alarms, thereby emphasising the seriousness with which the Fire Service treats such events.

Purpose

This policy is to reduce the risk of:

1. delays on the part of the Fire Service in response to genuine emergencies while attending to the investigation of false alarms;
2. failure on the part of building owners to maintain fire alarm systems in conditions which provide reliable protection against the risk of fire;
3. cross-subsidy on the part of those paying Fire Service levy of services used excessively or predominantly by the owners of buildings generating repeated false alarms; and
4. disregard on the part of building occupants of the significance of fire alarm signals caused by repeated exposure to false alarms.

This policy defines the charging and disputes process to be followed in the case of an emergency call turning out to be a false alarm.

Policy Scope

All members of the New Zealand Fire Service and, where appropriate, all members of Volunteer Brigades will comply with this policy.

Policy

A genuine fire alarm call results from one of the following events:

- 1) a person acting in good faith upon a well-founded belief that a fire is occurring, operates a manual call point or calls 111; or
- 2) an automatic system detects a temperature rise, flames, fumes or smoke resulting from a genuine fire, including the action of sprinklers or other fire suppression systems.

Any other call that results from the activation of a fire alarm system, which is not accompanied by evidence of a genuine fire, constitutes a false alarm.

The Service must not by its actions discourage or stop genuine calls for assistance therefore as a general rule a "good intent" false alarm is not a chargeable event.

The New Zealand Fire Service Commission has committed all regions to continuously reduce the number of avoidable false alarms. In that context Fire Region Managers are responsible for putting in place plans to encourage building owners to recognise the causes of false alarms and to educate them in the means they might use to fix problems. Regional management and Area Managers are expected to be aware of the premises in their districts that give rise to repeated false alarms and to target those premises specifically with advice.

For each charging event the charge will be rates specified by the Chief Financial Officer, plus GST.

Invoices shall be raised, based on data collected by the Fire Service for the third, and any subsequent, false alarms within a rolling 12 month period for all premises except stand-alone individual private residences. In certain circumstances charges may be waived by the Chief Fire Officer, or appointed person. Periodic reviews of waived charges will be undertaken.

Disputes and Waivers

- Applications for a waiver of false alarm charges must
- (a) be received by NZFS within 21 days of the date of notification of an incident by the NZFS
 - (b) be made in writing (either by letter, facsimile or email)
 - (c) be sent to the False Alarm Administrator at either :
 - (i) Level 10, 80 The Terrace, Wellington, (Mail)
 - (ii) (04) 471 1791 (Facsimile)
 - (iii) falsealarm.administrator@fire.org.nz (Email)
 - (d) set out clearly the reasons why the incident should not be charged and include copies of any relevant documents, photographs or other information

Only one application for waiver of false alarm charges is allowed per incident and there are no appeals from the determination of the dispute by NZFS.

Eligible grounds for a waiver of false alarm charges are as follows :

- (a) the organisation has purchased the premises within the last 12 months and were not owners when prior alarms were activated
- (b) the organisation can demonstrate that they are working with the NZFS and their alarm service provider to take action to reduce the incidence of false alarms
- (c) any other grounds as determined by the Chief Fire Officer that are in accordance with the purpose of this policy.

Definitions

False Alarm Any call attended by a fire brigade, where there was no genuine fire or other emergency requiring intervention to prevent injury, death or property loss.

There are three types of false alarm:

1. a **malicious false alarm** is where a person knowingly, wilfully or recklessly gives, or causes to be given, any false alarm of fire: a malicious false alarm is an offence under S88(c) and (d) of the Fire Service Act 1975;
2. a **false alarm - good intent** is where a person genuinely thought there was a fire or emergency, which later proved not to be true, such as steam mistaken for smoke; or
3. a **false alarm** is a response to almost all other fire alarm system activations where the call may have occurred due to the detection of heat, smoke or airborne contaminants, which did not result from an actual fire.

Premises Building or complex of buildings at one street address

Key Personnel and Roles

This policy is issued by the Chief Financial Officer.

Fire Region Commanders and National Headquarters managers are responsible for ensuring compliance with and implementation of this policy.

Chief Fire Officers are responsible for ensuring reporting information is accurate and complete.

The False Alarm Administrator is responsible for working with the Chief Fire Officers (or their delegates) in their regions regarding any disputes that may be received.

Accountabilities

The Chief Executive is accountable to the Commission to ensure that the New Zealand Fire Service operations adhere to and maintain this policy.

The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for the maintenance of this policy in conjunction with the Chief Executive.

Chief Fire Officers are accountable to the National Commander for compliance with Operational Instructions.

Assistance

For further assistance or advice please contact the Chief Financial Officer, National Headquarters. Copies of the current False Alarms Procedure can also be viewed on Firenet.