

**POLFA7.5****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 attendance of any brigade, where the reason for that attendance was the receipt of a false alarm of fire. Where that alarm came from persons or equipment in any premises, the owner of the premises will be liable to meet the charge.

The New Zealand Fire Service has made reducing the number of unwanted calls from both direct-connected and non-connected fire alarm systems a high priority goal. Traditionally, these have been called false alarms, but the term *unwanted* is more appropriate and clarifies that this type of call may have occurred due to the detection of heat, smoke or airborne contaminants, which did not result from an actual fire.

In trying to eliminate all unwanted 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 unwanted alarms from a single system are avoidable.

Charging building owners for Fire Service attendance at unwanted alarm events is a last resort. The Fire Service approach is to use the range of 'encourage, educate, engineer, and finally enforce' principles to reduce these unwanted 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 unwanted 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 unwanted alarms; and
4. disregard on the part of building occupants of the significance of fire alarm signals caused by repeated exposure to unwanted alarms.

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

### Policy Scope

This policy supports POLFA7.2 Sundry Revenue Policy and should be read and applied in conjunction with it.

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 an unwanted alarm.

The New Zealand Fire Service Commission's Strategic Plan commits Regions to continuous reduction in the incidence of avoidable false alarms. In that context Regional Managers are responsible for putting in place plans to encourage building owners to recognise unwanted alarm causes and to educate them in the means they might use to fix problems. Regional management and Chief Fire Officers are expected to be aware of the premises in their districts that give rise to repeated unwanted alarms and to target those premises specifically with advice.

On occurrence of the second unwanted alarm within any 12-month period, the False Alarm Administrator at National Headquarters will send a letter to the building owner stating the known circumstances of the alarms, and encouraging the building owner to rectify the problem. The letter will state that the Fire Service will seek to recover costs in accordance with section 47C(4) of the Fire Service Act 1975 should a third or subsequent unwanted alarm occur within 12 months of the first alarm.

If an unwanted alarm originates from a fire alarm system, then that event becomes a chargeable event if there have been two or more unwanted alarms originating from the same system in the previous 12 months. Thus if five false alarms are received from one system in 12 months then numbers 3, 4 and 5 will be considered for charging under this policy. The false alarm charging rules will be applied by the False Alarm Administrator,

as listed in Appendix 1a.

For each charging event the charge will be \$1,000 plus GST.

The False Alarm Administrator will arrange to invoice the building owner automatically upon receiving confirmation that a third or subsequent unwanted alarm from a particular fire alarm system has occurred within any 12 month period. The False Alarm Administrator will use the charging rules contained in Appendix 1a for the chargeable events listed in Appendix 1b. The invoice will be accompanied by a letter stating the known circumstances of each unwanted alarm and explaining that the Fire Service is seeking to recover costs in accordance with section 47C(4) of the Fire Service Act 1975.

Where the basis for issuing an invoice is disputed by a building owner, the False Alarm Administrator will ask the building owner to explain the nature of the dispute in writing and to send this to National Headquarters, together with any supporting evidence. The summary list in Appendix 1c may assist building owners in understanding the reason for charges being applied.

If, in the opinion of the False Alarm Administrator, the unwanted alarm event clearly falls within the charging rules, then the charge will be upheld. In any other case, the dispute will be referred to the relevant Chief Fire Officer in the case of a paid district or person appointed by the Regional Manager in the case of a volunteer district.

The Chief Fire Officer or appointed person may waive the charge for any of the reasons set out in Appendix 2. The reason for the waiver needs to be communicated to the Fire Alarm Administrator who will contact finance to credit the invoice, and notify the building owner accordingly.

## 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. an **unwanted fire alarm** is a response to almost all other fire alarm system activations (see Appendix 1b).

Note: A fire alarm system activation resulting from burning toast, for example, is generally an unwanted alarm, as repeated activations may be avoided by

relocating or replacing toasters, or relocating or replacing smoke detectors.

Note: A false alarm arising from defective apparatus is an unwanted alarm whether or not the cause of the fault or faults was foreseeable and preventable through routine maintenance. Defective apparatus means defective fire alarm equipment not other apparatus like a vacuum cleaner that burnt out and activated a smoke detector.

Unwanted false alarms from fire alarm systems are chargeable under section 47C(4) of the Fire Service Act 1975, as provided above.

**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 Managers 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.

### 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.

## False Alarm Charging Rules

No.	Rule	Comment
1	No false alarm charges for first unwanted alarm from a fire alarm system occurring more than 12 months after any previous unwanted alarm.	First unwanted alarm
2	No false alarm charges for second unwanted alarm from the same fire alarm system occurring less than 12 months after the first alarm defined above	Second unwanted alarm
3	Third or subsequent unwanted alarm from the same fire alarm system occurring less than 12 months after the first alarm defined above is considered for charging under this policy	
4	No false alarm charges for incidents related to automatic fire alarms occupied by the NZ Armed forces.	Building owner details not always identify that armed forces are using the building. The incident reports in SMS (for false alarm events) will include a tick box for identifying buildings occupied by armed forces.
5	No false alarm charges for incidents related to 111-calls for events at residential houses.	
6	No false alarm charges for incidents related to 111-calls where the address is incomplete (has no street number, no street name, or no town).	
7	No false alarm charges for incidents related to 111-calls where no first caller name is recorded.	
8	No false alarm charges for incidents related to where the building owner cannot be identified.	The False Alarm Administrator will try to get the building owner's contact details from LINZ. If the Fire cannot get these details from LINZ, then the False Alarm Administrator will mark the event as 'building owner unknown' in SMS.
9	No false alarm charges for incidents related to 111-calls marked '111 Police Call' in ICAD.	
10	No false alarm charges for incidents related to 111-calls marked '111 Ambulance Call' in ICAD.	

## Appendix 1b

## Matrix of Chargeable / Non-chargeable False Alarm Events

Key	Description
A	Chargeable false alarm event.
B	Non-chargeable false alarm event
C	Chief Fire Officer to determine whether false alarm chargeable
N/A	Not applicable.

	Calls from automatic fire alarms (connected directly to NZFS) – or – 111-Calls related to fire alarm activation (fire alarm not connected to NZFS).							
<b>Note: NZFS staff will select the detector type in incident report.</b>	Manual Call Point	Smoke Alarm (mains powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Alarm (battery powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Detector	Sprinkler	Thermal Detector	Other Detector	111-Call, no fire detected. Equipment involved or fire alarm did not activate
<b>1 External Environment</b>								
1.1 Barbeque or other outside (non-genuine) fire on the premises	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	B
1.2 Barbeque or other outside (non-genuine) fire in the vicinity	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
1.3 Genuine fire in the vicinity	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
1.4 Fumes from vehicles outside premises	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
1.5 Lightning	B	A	A	A	N/A	A	A	B
1.6 Mains water pressure increase	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A	N/A	B
1.7 Power surge	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	A	A	B
1.8 Radio interference	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	A	A	B
1.9 Wind	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	A	B
1.10 Unable to classify (with a box to enter description)	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C

	Calls from automatic fire alarms (connected directly to NZFS) – or – 111-Calls related to fire alarm activation (fire alarm not connected to NZFS).							
<b>Note: NZFS staff will select the detector type in incident report.</b>	Manual Call Point	Smoke Alarm (mains powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Alarm (battery powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Detector	Sprinkler	Thermal Detector	Other Detector	111-Call, no fire detected. Equipment involved or fire alarm did not activate
<b>2 Internal Environment</b>								
2.1 Animals (e.g. insects, birds, rodents)	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
2.2 Dirt or Dust	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
2.3 Flooding or water leaks	A	A	A	A	N/A	A	A	N/A
2.4 High air flow / draughts	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
2.5 Humidity	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
2.6 Pre-flame condition of over heating (Not toaster)	N/A	B	B	B	B	B	B	N/A
2.7 Unable to classify (with a box to write description)	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	N/A

	Calls from automatic fire alarms (connected directly to NZFS) – or – 111-Calls related to fire alarm activation (fire alarm not connected to NZFS).							
<b>Note: NZFS staff will select the detector type in incident report.</b>	Manual Call Point	Smoke Alarm (mains powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Alarm (battery powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Detector	Sprinkler	Thermal Detector	Other Detector	111-Call, no fire detected. Equipment involved or fire alarm did not activate
<b>3 Human Intervention</b>								
3.1 Accidental alarm activation by person other than service agent	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
3.2 Accidental alarm activation by contractor (not the fire alarm service agent)	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
3.3 Accidental alarm activation by service agent	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	N/A
3.4 Alarm Activation caused by non-fire related criminal activity	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
3.5 Lights mistaken for fire	B	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	B
3.6 Malicious activation (detector tampered with)	N/A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
3.7 Malicious (No sign of fire, no one in attendance)	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A
3.8 Smell of smoke	B	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	B
3.9 Steam or dust mistaken for smoke	B	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	B
3.10 Malicious Call	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
3.11 Unable to classify (with a box to write description)	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C

	Calls from automatic fire alarms (connected directly to NZFS) – or – 111-Calls related to fire alarm activation (fire alarm not connected to NZFS).							
<b>Note: NZFS staff will select the detector type in incident report.</b>	Manual Call Point	Smoke Alarm (mains powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Alarm (battery powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Detector	Sprinkler	Thermal Detector	Other Detector	111-Call, no fire detected. Equipment involved or fire alarm did not activate
<b>4 Building Usage</b>								
4.1 Work Process - Aerosol spray (e.g. from painting)	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.2 Work Process - Dust or Powder released during work process	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.3 Work Process - Fumes from chemicals released during work	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.4 Work Process - Fumes from fumigation activities	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.5 Work Process - Fumes from hot work or machinery released during work	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.6 Fumes from food processing (excl. from toasters)	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.7 Fumes from toasters	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.8 Forklift operation	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
4.9 Fumes from vehicles (vehicle within the building)	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.10 Steam (e.g. from bathroom, sauna, steam room, boiler)	N/A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
4.11 Water vapour / mist (e.g. from water blasting)	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	A	A	N/A
4.12 Smoke from smokers	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.13 Unable to classify (with a box to write description)	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C

	Calls from automatic fire alarms (connected directly to NZFS) – or – 111-Calls related to fire alarm activation (fire alarm not connected to NZFS).							
<b>Note: NZFS staff will select the detector type in incident report.</b>	Manual Call Point	Smoke Alarm (mains powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Alarm (battery powered) STAND ALONE	Smoke Detector	Sprinkler	Thermal Detector	Other Detector	111-Call, no fire detected. Equipment involved or fire alarm did not activate
<b>5 Equipment</b>								
5.1 Broken pipe	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5.2 Call point damaged	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5.3 Call point, No glass in box	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5.4 Defect detector - corrosion	N/A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A
5.5 Defect detector – failed head	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	A	A	N/A
5.6 Defect detector - water in detector	N/A	A	A	A	N/A	A	A	N/A
5.7 Defect fire alarm panel	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
5.8 Defect sprinkler head	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5.9 Defect system wiring	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
5.10 Flat battery	N/A	N/A	A	A	A	A	A	N/A
5.11 System water pressure drop	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5.12 Unable to classify (with a box to write description)	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	N/A
<b>6 Other</b>								
6.1 No apparent cause	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
6.2 Unable to classify (with a box to write description)	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C

## Summary of Chargeable / Non-chargeable False Alarm Events

### NON CHARGEABLE FIRE ALARM ACTIVATIONS

- ❑ the fire alarm was activated by temperature, flames, fumes or smoke resulting from a fire
- ❑ the fire alarm was activated with good intent i.e. the caller genuinely thought there was a fire or emergency.
- ❑ a fire alarm occurred due to actions of persons *remote* from the property e.g workers creating dust or fumes on a public street or on a neighbouring property.
- ❑ Where the Alarm Agent has accidentally set the system off.

### CHARGEABLE FIRE ALARM ACTIVATIONS

All unwanted and avoidable activations, including accidental and those from smoke detector systems, caused by events such as:

#### System Maintenance

- ❑ Defective equipment
- ❑ Flat battery
- ❑ Corrosion of detectors
- ❑ Defective or absence of maintenance
- ❑ Fire Alarm Panel defect
- ❑ System wiring defect
- ❑ Pressure drop within system

#### Building Maintenance & Internal Environment

- ❑ Flooding or water leaks
- ❑ Dirt or dust
- ❑ Humidity
- ❑ Insects, birds, rodents or other animals
- ❑ High air flow/draughts

#### Building Usage

- ❑ Dust or powder released during work process
- ❑ Fumes from chemicals released during work process
- ❑ Fumes from hot work or machinery during work process
- ❑ Fumes from food processing, *including* smoke from toasters [ie no damage to the appliance or surrounding fittings]
- ❑ Fumes from vehicle exhaust or other combustion engines
- ❑ Fumes from fumigation activities
- ❑ Steam from bathrooms, saunas, steam rooms, boilers etc
- ❑ Aerosol spray from fumigation, painting or other work process
- ❑ Water vapour/mist from water blasting or other work process
- ❑ Accidental alarm activation by moving objects

#### Internal Occupant Activity

- ❑ Accidental alarm activation by any person [worker/contractor/visitor]
- ❑ Malicious alarm activation by any person [known/unknown]
- ❑ Alarm activation caused by other criminal activity on site [non-fire related]

#### External Environment

- ❑ Lightning strike (is an insurable claim)
- ❑ Flooding or leaks
- ❑ Power surge
- ❑ Water Pressure drop
- ❑ Wind
- ❑ Radio [RT] interference

#### Note - Non chargeable also

- ❑ When the building owner agrees in writing to upgrade the fire alarm system to reduce unwanted alarms
- ❑ When the volunteer Chief Fire Officer decides not to because of the number of volunteer firefighters who work there, or another specific reason, as set out in Appendix 2.

**Appendix 2****Disputes**

The Chief Fire Officer or appointed person may waive the charge only for reasons set out below:

1. the building owner provides evidence that the fire alarm resulted from a genuine fire or was a false alarm – good intent;
2. the alarm resulted from agent error during the routine inspection, testing or maintenance of the fire alarm system;
3. the alarm resulted from the actions of persons remote from the premises: for example workers creating dust or fumes in a public street or neighbouring building;
4. the alarm resulted from notification by a third-party outside the premises that a fire was occurring;
5. the alarm was attended by volunteer firefighters released by an employer occupying the premises from which the alarm originated;
6. the alarm was malicious and the police have been notified;
7. the building owner has given prior written confirmation of work to be undertaken acceptable to the Fire Service to remedy conditions responsible for generating repeated unwanted alarms: this work may involve the relocation or replacement of devices or the upgrade of the fire alarm panel or control wiring; or
8. within a 12-month period following the completion of approved remedial work charges for Fire Service attendance may be waived for up to two further unwanted alarms.