

Unwanted Fire Signals

Understanding the Issue

Any delay in the detection of a fire can lead to an increase in risk both to life and property. An adequately designed, installed, monitored and maintained automatic fire detection system can help mitigate this risk by providing an early fire warning. This will enable a timely evacuation of the protected premises and the prompt notification of the fire to the fire & rescue service.

It should be noted that the fire & rescue service can reduce their attendance level response where the alarm notification is sent via an alarm receiving centre (ARC) from a monitored automatic fire alarm system. This may be as a result of excessive numbers of false alarms (unwanted fire signals). In some circumstances the response may be withdrawn altogether.

Under section 7 of The Fire Services Act 2004 responsibility is placed on fire authorities to make provision for fire fighting and not to attend premises to ascertain if a fire exists. This duty lies with the person who has responsibility for the premises.

An 'unwanted fire signal' is defined by the British Fire Protection System Association (BFPSA) as 'any fire alarm signal other than a genuine fire or test signal'. The consequences of unwanted fire signals may result in the diversion of essential services from other emergencies (potentially putting life and property at risk).

Controlling the Issue

Frequent false alarms may cause staff to become complacent and less willing to act quickly when the alarm activates.

Each premises should have an emergency fire action plan, which must include effective planning, organisation, control & monitoring and be able to review fire safety arrangements in place. It should include arrangements for carrying out a check of the premises if the fire alarm activates to ascertain the cause of the alarm before calling the fire & rescue service. This plan must form part of the Risk Assessment under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) for the premises.

It is also suggested that a key holder should be appointed to respond to fire alarm signals outside of hours of occupancy.



The following precautions are suggested to avoid as far as is practicable, unwanted fire signals and accordingly minimise the risk to your organisation.

A suitable person should be given overall responsibility for the system. The duties should include:

- If safe to do so, ascertaining the cause of the alarm before calling the fire & rescue service.
- Ensuring the system is properly maintained and in good working order.
- Ensuring members of staff with responsibilities for the system have received adequate training.
- Ensuring faults and false alarms are dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- Ensuring any changes likely to affect the system are properly managed, with guidance being sought from your local AIG risk engineer, in order to avoid future problems.

Reference

AIG RiskFix document Automatic Fire Detection
 AIG RiskFix document Risk Assessment and Self Inspection
 British Fire Protection System Association (BFPSA)
 CFOA Guidance for Reduction of False Alarms & Unwanted Fire Signals 2014

For further information please contact your local AIG risk engineer.

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