

## Unwanted Nuisance Alarms (False Alarms)



### False alarms

A false alarm is a fire alarm signal from a detection system that is not caused by fire. It is unwanted and is a nuisance. The causes of a false alarm include:

- Improperly installed or maintained equipment
- Inappropriate human action (someone pulling the fire alarm)
- A fire-like phenomenon (e.g. a fog machine triggering a smoke detector)
- Accidental damage to the system
- Equipment malfunction

### Why are False Alarm a Problem?

Put simply, false alarms can cost lives. Not only do they use firefighter's time and delay their attendance to real fires or medical emergencies, but false alarms can also cause people to become complacent and not react upon hearing the fire alarm sound.

Fatalities have been caused by people believing that it was "just another false alarm" and failing to evacuate in the event of actual danger.

In locations such as hospitals, schools and shopping centers where there are a large number of people on the premises, the threat becomes even greater. When a fire occurs, every second counts and any delay in evacuation can result in tragedy.

### False Alarm Prevention Methods

- Properly design, install and maintain your fire alarm system and work with one endorsed fire alarm service provider to ensure appropriate action and effective maintenance
- Isolate zones prior to construction work and cleaning smoke detector covers prior to their removal
- Designate a person (or people) to confirm whether a fire alarm is genuine
- Designate a person (or people) to inform the monitoring company in advance of a fire drill
- Follow up on every false alarm and make corrections or take preventive actions to prevent it from happening again
- Ensure proper procedures are in place for training new staff on how to deal with false alarms in locations with high staff turnover (i.e. hospitals)

- Educate users and responsible persons about how the alarm system and Fire Alarm Control Panel works and provide guidance on how to identify and report false alarms
- Use appropriate, approved and correctly located detectors
- Use approved protective covers over manual pull stations with adequate instructional signage
- Update your call list regularly and make sure everyone on the list knows the password on the system
- Install CCTV (closed circuit television) as a deterrent to pranksters (especially in schools and apartments)

## **Enforcement**

Since reaching an all time high of 1,700 annual unwanted nuisance alarms in previous years, the Vancouver Fire Department has been proactively enforcing the Vancouver Municipal Code to educate and motivate fire alarm system owners to reduce or eliminate preventable unwanted nuisance alarm.

For additional information please contact the Vancouver Fire Marshal at [vanfmo@cityofvancouver.us](mailto:vanfmo@cityofvancouver.us) or call (360) 487-7260 or TTY: 711