

Fire Department Oral Report – Burglar Alarm Task Force

The Los Angeles Fire Department is directly and/or indirectly impacted by burglar alarms in the City of Los Angeles. Fire companies responded to 20,547 automatic fire alarms during the 2002 calendar year. This represents 34% to 35% of the non-EMS related incidents. Approximately 92% of the Automatic Fire Alarms were determined to be a false alarm.

Typically the false alarms are caused by false activation of alarm devices, by intentional activation of alarm devices, by construction activity near fire alarm devices, by fire alarm companies during alarm tests and by fire alarm system malfunction.

However, a portion of these alarm incidents are actually burglar alarms. Fire resources may be dispatched in error to burglar alarms for the following reasons:

1. Malfunction of the Alarm System and/or Central Station

- *Many single-family dwellings have burglar alarms installed with smoke detectors without approved State Fire Marshal listings. Approximately 22% of the automatic alarms that the Fire Department responds to are single family dwellings. These burglar alarms with fire warning devices are poorly regulated and many times installed without permits or adequate testing after installation.*
- *Some burglar alarms that have fire warning devices on common signaling zones prevent the monitoring company from differentiating between a fire alarm or a burglar alarm and fire companies will be dispatched*
- *The resident because of their unfamiliarity with the alarm system accidentally activates some burglar alarms with fire warning devices.*

2. Fire resources improperly requested upon activation of a burglar alarm

- *Confusion by the public when they hear a burglar alarm that believes it is a fire alarm.*
- *Erroneous information obtained by a central station will cause the Fire Department to be called a burglar alarm.*
- *Occasionally fire resources are requested to known burglar alarms because of their fast response time.*

3. Fire resources are requested by LAPD for burglar alarms

- *Fire companies are requested to assist the LAPD with access to buildings with activated burglar alarms for ladders or forcible entry purposes.*
- *Fire Station Commanders are frequently called during the middle of the night to do owner searches for buildings, which had an alarm activation.*

4. Indirect Impacts of responding to any false alarm.

- *Emergency response place the firefighters at risk. Last year there were numerous traffic accidents that a fire apparatus was involved.*
- *Fire resources that are responding or investigating false alarms are not readily available for other life threatening fire and EMS incidents.*

Workload Relief – False Alarms

Curiously, 34% of the false alarms we respond to occur within 500 of the same occupancies that may or may not be related to burglar alarms. To help minimize the Fire Department's workload, we are working on a pilot program, which has targeted occupancies that have excessive false alarms. Through a collaborative effort between the building owner, fire alarm company, and the Fire Department, specific problems are defined to determine the cause of the excessive false alarms and solutions are agreed to that will minimize the false alarms.

Essentially this is an educational opportunity for all the participants and initial meetings have been very positive. The effectiveness of this pilot program will be determined by the reduction false alarms in these targeted occupancies.

Final Statement

In today's current environment the public safety officers are our communities "first line of defense" and with limited resources they should be managed judiciously.