Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service

REDUCING FALSE ALARMS

There is no doubt that the disturbance caused to businesses and the occupiers of premises by false alarms is a problem that managers will wish to keep to an absolute minimum. However, if should a fire occur, it is vital that the system operates correctly and people are alerted and evacuate immediately.

Listed below are a series of solutions that can be implemented to address the common faults encountered.

COMMON FAULTS AND SOLUTIONS

- **Call Filtering** - if your fire alarm sounds, check first to confirm if there is a fire or fire symptoms before calling NIFRS. Do not call NIFRS if it is a false alarm. The only exception is in residential care premises when NIFRS should always be called immediately.

- **Zone Plan** - a zone plan, or a written description of the zone locations relating to your fire alarm system, should always be on display beside your fire alarm panel.

- **Log Book** - the user should maintain a log book to record all false alarms, the action taken, and the maintenance and testing of the system.

- **Staff Training** - should include input on the type of fire alarm system in your premises and the correct procedures for both raising the alarm and investigating a fire alarm actuation. Details of training must be recorded.

- **Keyholder** - a keyholder trained to reset the alarm system should be contacted by the Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisation (FAMO) or Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) in the event of an alarm outside of normal business hours. They should be able to attend the premises within 20 minutes of being notified. NIFRS will not reset alarm panels.

- **System Faults** - a maintenance contract must be in place to rectify faults and service the system on a regular basis.

- **Cooking Fumes** - ensure heat detectors are fitted in kitchen areas and ensure that adequate ventilation is provided. Many false alarms are caused by the inappropriate siting of detectors or the wrong type of detector for the identified risk.

- **Steam** - ensure that adequate ventilation is provided in showers or bathrooms and consider resiting or fitting an alternative type of detector if steam is causing repeated false alarms.

- **Call Points** - prevent accidental operation and deter malicious operation by moving manual call points to a more suitable location or fitting a protective flap or cover over call points. If a cover or flap is fitted, clear instruction on use must be provided to staff and visitors.

- **Smoking** - smoking regulations prevent most premises from having indoor smoking areas. They are permitted in care homes, hospices and prisons but must be a specific room with adequate ventilation and a heat detector.

- **Dust from Workers/Engineers** - people must be briefed in advance. If dust will be generated, place a cover over the detector head and remove when the work is complete. No-one should be permitted to work in the area, or on the system without being briefed by management in advance.

- **Fire Alarm Companies** - if your premises is/are connected to a Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisation (FAMO) or ARC, make sure they are informed before any work is carried out on the system. If your alarm actuates, ensure they can contact your premises to confirm that a fire, or signs of fire, have been detected. Advise them of your normal hours of business because this information may affect any emergency response from NIFRS.

- **Weekly Tests** - complete the required weekly test of your alarm system at the same time and on the same day of each week for all routine fire alarm system checks and inform your FAMO/ARC of this day and time.