Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service

FALSE ALARM POLICY

Measures to reduce the number of false alarms and unnecessary mobilisations

Effective from 1 February 2024

Safer Together

Version	Internal Approval	Board Approval	Date of Review
4	01/02/2024	20/09/2023	01/02/2027

Contents

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Linked Policy, Procedure & Guidance

NIFRS Policy/Procedure

This False Alarm Policy should be read in conjunction with, but not limited to, the following NIFRS policies and procedures:

> Regional Control Centre Call Challenge Policy
> Regional Control Centre Call Management Policy
> Reducing False Alarms Guidance Note
> Fire Alarm Monitoring Code of Practice

The above documents can be accessed via the Global Folders, and the Reducing False Alarms Guidance Note and the Fire Alarm Monitoring Code of Practice is also available on NIFRS Website at www.nifrs.org.

Best Practice

This False Alarm Policy is based on the following Departmental and/or other Best Practice Guidance documents:

> Managing Public Money Northern Ireland

The above document can be accessed via the website of the Departmant of Finance.

> Code of Practice Best Practice for Summoning a Fire Response via Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations
> CFOA Guidance for the Reduction of False Alarms & Unwanted Fire Signals

The above documents can be accessed via the website of the National Fire Chiefs Council.

> British Standard 8591 - Remote centres receiving signals from alarm systems. Code of Practice.
> British Standard EN 50518 - European Standard for Monitoring and Alarm Receiving Centres

The above documents can be purchased widely from a range of sources.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this False Alarm Policy is to detail Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) protocols for the effective management of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs). This is a two stranded approach that includes:

1. Engagement with the managers of premises to provide advice; and
2. Providing a proportionate emergency response to premises based on the information provided to call handlers.

The policy details expectations for NIFRS staff, fire alarm monitoring organisations, fire alarm installers, fire alarm maintainers and the end users of fire alarm systems.

1.2 Aims

The aims of this Policy are to:

> provide a proportionate and consistent response to AFAs;
> reduce the number of false alarms and unnecessary mobilisations of NIFRS resources;
> provide engagement advice to stakeholders on how to manage their systems and reduce false alarms; and
> support the managers of premises to comply with fire safety legislation.

1.3 Scope

This Policy applies to all Operational and Regional Control Centre (RCC) staff.

1.4 Legal Responsibility

The legal drivers for this Policy are:

> The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006; and
> The Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

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NIFRS will always respond to calls reporting a fire but is not legally required to respond to calls originating from a fire alarm system if a fire, or signs of a fire, have not been confirmed.

The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 (the Order) states that the employer and persons in control to any extent of relevant premises are legally responsible and must have in place a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) that details, amongst other measures, what actions are to be taken upon actuation of a fire alarm system. The FRA should include action to notify NIFRS via the 999 system as soon as a fire, or physical signs of fire, are confirmed.

In many types of premises it will be appropriate to investigate the cause of an alarm before notifying NIFRS. Where an investigation period is employed, the fire and rescue service ought not to be called until the outcome of the investigation is known (except in residential care premises where it is necessary to summon the fire and rescue service as soon as the fire detection and fire alarm system operates). This can minimise disruption to the occupiers, and prevent false alarms being transmitted to NIFRS. It is not sufficient to rely upon NIFRS to investigate the reason for the actuation of the system.

In addition, the Order states that a person shall be guilty of an offence if they knowingly report a false alarm (a fire or other emergency) to NIFRS and on summary conviction shall be liable to a fine and details held on a criminal record.

1.5   Risk Based Approach

The decision to respond or not to an unconfirmed AFA is a careful balance between the risk to the community and the cost of response. The costs are not only financial but include the disruption to safety critical training, delivering safety initiatives and daily work routines.

NIFRS mobilisation data is summarised in Table 1 below.

Total Number of:	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
AFA Mobilised Incidents	7,894	7,823	8,054	7,423	7,769	8,435	**47,398**
AFA Confirmed Fires	119	99	110	95	117	84	**624**
AFA Confirmed Fires %	1.5%	1.3%	1.4%	1.3%	1.5%	1.0%	**1.3%**
AFA False Alarms	7,775	7,724	7,944	7,328	7,652	8,351	**46,774**
AFA False Alarms %	98.5%	98.7%	98.6%	98.7%	98.5%	99.0%	**98.7%**

Table 1 - False Alarms Attended

In the 6 years from 2017 to 2022, 46,774 mobilisations (98.7%) were made to AFA incidents that turned out to be false alarms.

1.6 Risks and Implications

The risk of poor financial management will be reduced through the implementation of this policy, by ensuring public resources are managed responsibly in the public interest.

The implications are that NIFRS will appropriately align the resources mobilised to automatic fire alarms against the potential risk of death or injury, or damage to property from fire.

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2. Policy Statements

2.1   Call Challenging

The RCC will implement a call challenging policy to ensure that the call is valid and to determine the premises type and occupancy status.

2.2   Pre-Determined Attendance

The Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) to an automatic fire alarm where **no fire has been confirmed** will depend on the type and occupancy of the premises.

Premises Type	Occupancy Status	PDA
Contains sleeping accommodation	Occupied or Unoccupied	One pumping appliance
Does not contain sleeping accommodation	Unoccupied	One pumping appliance
	Occupied	No mobilisation*
Unknown	Occupied or Unoccupied	One pumping appliance

*Caller will be advised to identify the source of the alarm and confirm if there is or is not a fire present. If a fire is confirmed caller advised to call NIFRS back and the PDA for a confirmed fire will be mobilised. If a fire is not confirmed caller advised not to call NIFRS back.

2.3   Enhanced Pre-Determined Attendance

In exceptional circumstances, the Area Group Commander (Operations) may increase the PDA due to an identified enhanced premises risk.

Enhanced PDAs are to be reviewed annually to confirm that the enhancement continues to be necessary.

2.4   No Sign of Fire Informative Message

If an enhanced PDA has been mobilised, and the first pump investigates and sends back a *"No sign of fire investigating"* informative message, the other responding resources should continue to respond at normal road speed.

2.5   Confirmation of a False Alarm

Where a caller re-contacts the RCC and confirms there has been a false alarm, appliances will be turned back.

2.6   Re-Activation

Where a caller re-contacts the RCC and states there has been a re-activation, the caller will be challenged to confirm if they have investigated the source of the alarm.

The Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) to re-activation of an automatic fire alarm where **no fire has been confirmed** is as outlined in Section 2.2.

If the caller has not investigated the source of the alarm, they will be advised to do so and simultaneously the PDA will be mobilised.

2.7   Key Holder Not Present

Key holder details are not held by the RCC or the PSNI for any premises. Premises managers should ensure arrangements are in place to mobilise a key holder to premises.

Where a key holder is not present, or does not attend, the officer in charge is to:

> carry out a 360 of the premises where possible;

> use a thermal imaging camera to check for signs of heat;

> check for signs of smoke, through windows, vents and openings; and

> only force an entry when signs of a fire have been confirmed.

The officer in charge is to ensure that all reasonable steps suitable for the premises have been taken prior to returning to base.

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2.8   Resetting Alarms

Premises managers should ensure effective arrangements are in place to reset alarms and address defects.

NIFRS personnel:

> must not reset alarms; and
> should only silence alarms when it has been confirmed there is no fire.

2.9   STOP Messages

Where entry has been gained and no fire has been discovered, the stop message should include:

> the address of the premises;
> False Alarm Due to Apparatus and the cause of the alarm;
> the location of the actuated detector head; and
> confirmation that false alarm advice has been provided.

Where entry has not been gained and no fire has been discovered, the stop message should include:

> the address of the premises;
> False Alarm Due to Apparatus Cause Unknown
> 360 conducted (or front and rear of premises checked, etc);
> thermal image camera used to check for heat; and
> no visible signs of heat or fire.

2.10 Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations

NIFRS has published a *"Fire Alarm Monitoring Code of Practice"* to detail arrangements for effective liaison, collaboration, communication and mutual co-operation between NIFRS and Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations.

The aims of the code of practice are to provide a working framework for co-operation and coordination; provide clarity on expectations and protocols; reduce the number of false alarms; and reduce the impact on NIFRS resources, activates and personnel.

NIFRS Fire Alarm Monitoring Code of Practice is published on NIFRS website, available at the link above.

2.11 Fire Alarm Systems Maintenance

NIFRS encourages that fire alarm systems are installed, commissioned and maintained in accordance with British Standard 5839.

2.12 Fire Alarm System End Users

NIFRS encourages the end users of fire alarm systems to continually review the suitability of their system and take active measure to reduce the number of false alarms transmitted to NIFRS. NIFRS have published a series of common faults and solutions in a *"Reducing False Alarms Guidance Note"* which is available on NIFRS Website at www.nifrs.org.

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3.   Roles & Responsibilities

3.1   Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Operations Delivery)

The Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Operations Delivery) is responsible for:

> the overall implementation of the False Alarm Policy.

3.2   Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Operations Support)

The Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Operations Support) is responsible for:

> the overall management of the RCC in respect of emergency call handling and mobilising; and

> embedding this policy into service training.

3.3   Regional Control Centre

RCC staff are responsible for:

> call challenging in accordance with the Regional Control Centre Call Challenge Policy;

> turning back appliances on confirmation of a false alarm;

> for a re-activation if the caller has not investigated the source of the alarm, they will be advised to do so and simultaneously the PDA will be mobilised;

> on receipt of a "no sign of fire" informative message instructing any other resources attending to attend at normal road speed; and

> ensuring effective procedures are communicated and maintained with Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations.

3.4   Headquarters Group Commanders (Protection)

The Headquarters Group Commander (Protection) is responsible for:

> acting as the service lead for advice on the management of automatic fire alarms; and

> reviewing this policy and associated guidance when necessary.

3.5   Group Commanders (Prevention & Protection)

Group Commanders (Prevention & Protection) are responsible for:

> managing educational activities to support the managers of premises to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals in accordance with Prevention & Protection Workflow Process 20.

3.6   Group Commanders (Operations)

Group Commanders (Operations) are responsible for:

> carrying out an annual review of enhanced PDAs to confirm that the enhancement continues to be necessary; and

> in exceptional circumstances, determining if a time bound enhanced PDA is required to a specific premises due to a newly identified risk.

3.7   Fire Safety Inspectors

Fire Safety Inspectors are responsible for:

> engaging with the managers of premises when carrying out fire safety inspections in accordance with NIFRS "Reducing False Alarms Guidance Note"; and

> carrying out the role of subject matter advisor in relation to the management of automatic fire alarms for internal and external enquiries.

3.8   Emergency Response Drivers

Emergency Drivers are responsible for:

> responding in accordance with NIFRS Driving Policy;

> driving at a safe speed taking into account the mobilising information received; and

> using Audible and Visual Warning Devices, unless the first pump to an enhanced PDA puts back a "no sign of fire informative message". If so, following resources should respond under normal road conditions.

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3.9　Officer in Charge

The Officer in Charge is responsible for:

> meeting with the responsible person to confirm if there is or is not a fire;

> identifying the cause of the alarm where possible;

> mobilising additional resources to suspected or confirmed fires as appropriate;

> providing a detailed stop message to the RCC.

3.10　Operational Staff

Operational staff are responsible for:

> providing advice to the public and managers of premises in accordance with NIFRS "False Alarm Policy" and "Reducing False Alarms Guidance Note".

4. Training & Awareness

Directors/Area Commanders must ensure that all personnel under their command are conversant with the contents of this Policy.

5. Monitoring & Reporting

Policy compliance will be monitored and reported through the Prevention & Protection Delivery Forum, with issues elevated when appropriate to the relevant Director.

6. Equality

This Policy will be reviewed periodically in accordance best practice and also with regard to NIFRS statutory obligations to make our corporate publications and information accessible in alternative formats, where reasonable.

7. Review & Revision

This Policy will be reviewed on a three-yearly cycle, or sooner if required to reflect organisational change, or to meet legislative requirements. Reviews will be conducted by the Headquarters Group Commander (Protection).

8. Approval

In line with the NIFRS Governance Document Development Policy & Procedure, this Policy document and any subsequent significant changes must be presented to the NIFRS Board or Standing Committee thereof for approval.

Any subsequent minor changes may be approved on behalf of the NIFRS Board by the lead Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Member.

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9. Further Information & Guidance

Further information and guidance about this False Alarm Policy can be obtained from:

Protection Department

NIFRS Headquarters

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T 028 9266 4221

E protection@nifrs.org

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