

2010



City of Jacksonville False Alarm Prevention User Awareness Class

Introduction

False alarms are a problem for everyone, the alarm user/alarm owner, the alarm company and the police department. Several cities throughout the country have implemented no response policies, due to excessive false alarms. With the growing number of alarm system used throughout the City of Jacksonville, all alarm users or alarm owners must be aware of how to correctly operate their alarm system. If every subscriber had "just a few" false alarms per year, the Jacksonville Police Department would be responding to over 10,000 false alarms. At a cost of \$1.2 million dollars, this is a waste of taxpayer's money.

Why do we need to Change?

From 2001 through 2009 the Police Department responded to over **27,000** alarm calls, with **99.97 %** of the alarm calls received were false and a police response was not necessary. False alarms cost the City **over \$3.1 million dollars** in wasted man-hours and equipment cost over the past ten years.

In addition to the personnel cost to the City of Jacksonville taxpayers, there are other items that effect police response to false alarms. When officers routinely respond to false alarms at the same location, they can become complacent. This is human nature. When alarm calls are dispatched to officers, their adrenaline is active, hoping to catch a suspect who is attempting to burglarize a home or business.

What are we doing?

The City of Jacksonville Police Department is constantly striving to educate user/alarm owners and alarm companies to eliminate false alarms. In order to accomplish this goal, the City of Jacksonville has developed several tools to reduce the number of false alarms, such as:

- 1) A City Code to assess for excessive false alarms
- 2) False Alarm Prevention Program (User Awareness Class)
- 3) Helpful tips on False Alarm warnings
- 4) A False Alarm Notification Card
- 5) Flyers and Brochures
- 6) Newspaper Articles and announcements

Everyone must do their part to reduce the number of false alarms

The City of Jacksonville does allow an alarm company to call the 9-1-1 center to cancel a burglary alarm call. Panic and Holdup alarms are not

cancelled. Every central station has different verification and cancellation policies, and each user should contact his/her alarm company for instruction on canceling alarm activation.

What happens when my alarm is activated?

When the 9-1-1 center receives a report of an alarm activation, either from an alarm company central station or from a private individual, several wheels are set in motion. The 9-1-1 telecommunicator answers the call and obtains the necessary information that officers need to respond and check the location. The call is then assigned to available patrol units. Under normal circumstances, a two patrol officers are sent to alarm activations. Contrary to popular belief, they are not necessarily dispatched from the Police Department; they are dispatched after they have finished a previous call. Response times vary, depending on the calls for police service in the area. During certain situations, additional officers or K-9 Units may be called for assistance in checking the premises for suspects (i.e. large stores or warehouses). The Jacksonville Police Department handles each alarm activation call as an actual criminal act, until the premises have been checked and it has been determined that an attempt break-in or criminal act has not been committed.

If a criminal act has not occurred the officers will give the alarm call a false alarm disposition. The officers will leave a "False Alarm Notification" card on the premises, if someone has not responded from the business or residence to assist the officers in checking the premises. The False Alarm Notification card informs the alarm subscriber/alarm owner that the Jacksonville Police Department responded to an alarm activation on a specific date and time, and what the officers determined to be the cause of the alarm.

It is recommended that a responsible party from alarm owner to meet the officers at the scene of an activated alarm to assist the officers in determining what activated the alarm system. Only the businesses or residence owner knows what has been taken from their premises. If a responsible party (preferably with keys) does not respond to the alarm activation to meet the police officers, the officers can only check what is accessible to them.

False alarms can be caused by many different things, such as Realtors, visiting relatives, equipment malfunctions and unsecured doors and windows. Many of these types of activations can be prevented. There is a reason for alarm activation. It is the responsibility of the alarm user/alarm owner and their alarm

company to determine the cause of the alarm and to remedy the problem to prevent further occurrences.

Many equipment problems can be prevented with proper maintenance and occasional service on the alarm system. An alarm system is like a car, it needs to be serviced at least every twelve (12) months. A proper maintenance program can prevent false alarms that occur due to low batteries, dirty contacts, unsecured magnets, etc.

WAYS TO AVOID FALSE ALARMS

Power to the Panel

Is the alarm panel transformer plugged into a 24-hour outlet? The alarm system must have AC power. NEVER unplug the transformer, you may forget to plug it back in. If your power must be off for more than 10 hours, please call your alarm company.

What shape is the battery in? The battery's life depends on how often power outages occur and how many accessories the system is driving (i.e., keypads, motion detectors, smoke detectors, etc.) Most panels will send a low battery signal to the central station when the battery's voltage lowers to a certain level.

Low batteries are one of the most common equipment reasons for false alarm activations.

Door and Windows

Be sure the door or window is completely closed and locked. If an unlocked door is opened by a person, wind, dog, etc., and the alarm is activated along with a police response, it is considered a false alarm.

What to watch for in doors

- Unsecured magnets
- Warping of the top of the door
- A metal or metal sheathed door should have a larger or stronger magnet
- Closed but not latched and locked doors (especially your delay doors)
- An increased gap between door and jamb due to settling of house
- For double doors – make sure fixed side is pinned on top and bottom
- Shaking a door should not set off the alarm

What to watch for in windows

Windows should be completely closed and **locked** – it may show a good circuit at the time of arming, but a misaligned magnet and contact may false with a change in temperature or humidity

- Unsecured magnets
- Windows should be completely closed and locked – it may show a good circuit at the time of arming, but a misaligned magnet and contact may false with a change in temperature or humidity
- Casement windows that are cranked closed against the closed latch with the latch not securing the window
- Mini blinds attracted to the magnet
- Unplugged alarm screens
- Tears or excessive patches on window foil

Motion Detectors

- A motion detector should be aimed directly toward an air vent or fireplace.
- Caution should be used in placing plants in field of view of motion detector.
- Mylar balloons are a common cause of false alarms.
- If pets are in your premises while the interior motion(s) is/are on, be sure the detector and lenses are designed to provide a pet alley. If you acquire a pet, please contact your alarm company.
- Spiders or bugs may form webs around the detector or may actually get inside the case. Keep the face of the detector.
- Drafts in the walls can cause false alarms if the motion detector is flush mount.
- Movement of vertical blinds can cause false alarms.
- Christmas and Holiday decorations cause false alarms.
- Motion detectors need a clear view – do not block them. Do not stack things around the line of view, as they may fall over.
- Ceiling fans cause air movement – this can cause false alarms.

ALARM SYSTEM MAINTENANCE INSPECTION

Monthly or More Frequently

- Check door and window latches as well as locks.
- If alarm screens are part of the alarm system, clips or other fasteners should be inspected.
- Contact switches and magnets on doors and windows should be clean and tight. Window cleaning can loosen or dislodge magnets.
- The area around smoke detectors, motion sensors or other interior devices should be inspected for dust, webs and insects. Interior cleaning of these must be done by your alarm company.
- Test the alarm system with your central station as recommended in the alarm system owner's manual. Always call your central station BEFORE starting a test again AFTER the test is complete.
- Your alarm system should always be tested after any telephone work is completed. Incorrect wiring can prevent the system from communicating with the central station under certain circumstances.
- The alarm system will seize your telephone line during communication with the central station. This is normal. The alarm system is sending the central station the information regarding the activity of your alarm system. This will only last for 5 to 30 seconds.
- Advise your alarm company of any telephone number change at home or work. Telephone numbers for your responsible parties should be checked for any changes.

Annually

- System sensors equipped with 9-volt batteries require replacement of the batteries annually. Replacement batteries should be the exact standard part that is recommended by the manufacturer. For example, if alkaline batteries are specified, do not use lithium. If in doubt, call your alarm company.
- The backup battery in the system control should be inspected. Normally, backup batteries will last for 5 years; however in Eastern North Carolina the life is usually 2-3 years. Due primarily to our extreme summer heat and humidity. If your battery appears to be leaking, call your alarm company to arrange for the proper replacement.

- When the alarm system is more than 10 years old, it may be time to consider an upgrade or replacement. An alarm system is like a car, it will not last forever.
- When your alarm system has generated a false alarm call, call your alarm company for troubleshooting ideas.
- Renew your City of Jacksonville alarm user permit. It is important to update the information on the permit, along with the responsible party name and telephone number listings.
- Consider having your alarm company inspect and test the system annually. Preventive maintenance can save false alarms, trouble and expensive repairs when done by a trained technician.
- Verify the cancellation procedures with the central station.

The majority of false alarms are caused by HUMAN ERROR. False alarms caused by human error are the easiest to prevent. It is extremely important that you understand how your alarm system works, in order to prevent the unfortunate mistakes that can cause a police dispatch to an alarm activation, when there is not a valid criminal act. False alarms caused by human error are considered false alarms and subject to civil penalty.

User Errors

Make sure everyone who has access (this also means keys) to the premises know how to operate (turn the alarm on and off) the alarm system and knows how to clear a false alarm with the monitoring company. This included baby-sitters, maids, Realtors, relatives, teachers, janitors, etc.

- Keep your responsible party list that you provide to your monitoring service up to date.
- Be sure that telephone repairmen, electricians, carpenters and other repairmen or servicemen aware and careful of the alarm system.
- Call the central station and inform them of any remodeling, repair, electrical, telephone line work that is going to be done at the premises.
- Mice can chew through phone and power cables. Birds in warehouses can activate motion detectors.
- If you change anything at the premises; please call your alarm company.
- Make sure everyone is out of the building or residence before arming the system.

- Make sure a responsible party is available to meet police officers when the alarm has been activated.
- Panic buttons should not be accessible to children or where anyone may bump them. Children are curious and like to “push buttons”.
- If the alarm system has a duress code, make sure that the last digit is on the other side of the keypad. This eliminates accidentally hitting the wrong key because they are so close together.
- Every person who uses the system should know their password or identification code for verification with the central station.
- During hurricane season, double check all doors and windows to make sure they will not blow open.

City Code

This section is a brief summary of Chapter 21 – Automatic Alarm Systems of the Jacksonville City Code. It is the responsibility of the alarm user and Alarm Company to read a copy of the City Code included in this manual, to ensure that they understand all sections and penalties of the City Code.

The Jacksonville City Code on Alarm System holds alarm user responsible for excessive false alarm activations. This is designed to insure the user notifies their alarm company upon the first alarm activation, in order to prevent further alarms. The intent of the City Code is to ensure that police officers are not diverted from responding to actual criminal activity as a result of responding to false alarms.

Alarm Companies

The Jacksonville City Code outlines responsibilities for both alarm companies and alarm user/alarm owners. The alarm company is required to install an alarm system in good working order and to take reasonable measures to prevent false alarms, to train the alarm users/alarm owner and to instruct them on the importance of preventing false alarms. The alarm user/alarm owner is responsible to use that alarm system correctly, the way it was intended. They are also responsible for training anyone who has been given keys to the premises, on how to properly use the alarm system. The alarm user/alarm owners should be familiar with the cancellation procedures of their central station. It is also their responsibility to lock and secure all doors and windows, prior to activating the alarm system.

The City of Jacksonville requires alarm companies and alarm agents to purchase a business license, which is renewed annually. Upon notification of an alarm business who has not applied for and received a business license, the Police Department will notify the offending company. If the alarm business does not comply with the City Code, the alarm company or agent may be prosecuted for operating business without a license.

Registration Required

The City of Jacksonville also requires all users of robbery and burglary alarm system to register each alarm system annually, for each alarm location. The Alarm User Permit is updated on an annual basis, and allows for any changes to the permit application each year. Those alarm owners failing to register will be assessed a \$100 fine (per incident) in addition to any false alarm fee that may be required. The permit allows the central station and the 9-1-1 center to dispatch the alarm call quickly, eliminating the time needed for repetitive information. The permit also ensures accuracy of all information pertaining to the alarm location.

Fines and Fees

The Jacksonville City Code assesses alarm user/alarm owners for excessive false alarms. An alarm system may generate two false alarms within a consecutive 365-day period. Upon the third and each subsequent false alarm, assessment may be imposed. The **False Alarm Fee Schedule** is shown below:

- Third, fourth and fifth false alarm \$50.00
- Sixth and seventh false alarm \$100.00
- Eighth and ninth false alarm \$250.00
- Tenth and over false alarms \$500.00
- Failure to Register \$100.00
- ***Other Civil Penalty(ies)***. Violations will be enforced through the assessment of civil penalty(ies) in the amount of \$100.00.
- ***Annual Permit Registration*** \$10.00

Appeals Process

Assessments of civil penalty(ies) and other enforcement decisions may be appealed by filing a written notice of appeal with the Jacksonville Police Department within ten (10) days after the date of notification of the assessment of civil penalty(ies) or other enforcement decision. Failing to give notice of appeal within this time period constitute a waiver of the right to contest the

assessment of penalty(ies) or other enforcement decision. Appeals shall be heard through an administrative process.

An appeal to the Initial Notice of Assessment should specifically state the alarm date for which the appeal is regarding, what caused the alarm to activate and what corrective action was taken to remedy the problem. The City Code allows defenses for false alarms that occur due to unusually severe weather condition or other extraordinarily circumstances beyond the control of the user or alarm system business.

The Alarm Administrator is the Hearing Officer. The hearing officer will determine whether the alarm pending assessment is false or valid. Upon the determination that the alarm is false, The Hearing Officer may rule that the that the subscriber is responsible for the assessment.

The Jacksonville Police Department Alarm Administrator is available to answer any questions about the alarm activations, City Code, police response and dispatch procedures.

**IF EVERYBODY DOES THEIR PART,
FALSE ALARMS WILL BE REDUCED!**

**BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR ALARM SYSTEM
ELIMINATE FALSE ALARMS!**

FALSE ALARM PREVENTION PROGRAM

Please take a few minutes to give us your comments and suggestions to help us plan future programs of this type.

Class Date: _____

NC Burglar and Fire Alarm Association Instructor

Jacksonville Police Department Instructor:

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**Please rate this program according to the following
guidelines: (Select One)**

- Worthwhile. I had no previous knowledge of this subject.
- Worthwhile. The presentation increased or improved my knowledge.
- Somewhat worthwhile. The program added to or reinforced my previous knowledge, but not much.
- Could have been worthwhile, if the class material had been better.
- Could have been worthwhile, if the instructors had been better
- Not worthwhile. It was repetitious of what I had already learned. No increased knowledge.

ALARM SCHOOL EXAM

A passing score of 70% is required to receive a fine waiver.

1). What is a False Alarm?

2). What is the most common reason for false alarm activations?

3). How often should your alarm be inspected?

4). Can Panic and/or Hold-up alarms be cancelled by the alarm company?
Yes No

5). Back-up batteries are not necessary if your alarm system is plugged into AC power.

True False

6). Domesticated animals should be provided with a pet alley.

True False

7). Your alarm system should always be tested after any telephone work is completed.

True False

8). It is permissible for you to test your alarm by activating your alarm and timing the police response.

True False

9). It is not necessary to register your alarm if you are a senior citizen (over 65).

True False

10). It shall be unlawful to install, maintain, or use an audible alarm system which can sound continually for more than 30 minutes.

True False