

LOS ANGELES

Modified Policy on Alarms Proposed

LAPD would be given discretion to respond to unverified burglar calls.

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Los Angeles police commanders and officers would have the discretion to respond to unverified burglar alarms under a modified proposal by Police Commission Executive Director Dan Koenig.

The commission triggered a political firestorm of opposition when it voted in January to stop responding to unverified alarms, arguing that most are false and needlessly tie up police resources.

Police Chief William J. Bratton had strongly backed the plan, which also called for an end to police radio dispatches when unverified alarms are received. Bratton declined to comment Wednesday until he had a chance to review the report.

Under the new proposal, patrol units would still be alerted when unverified alarms were received, but response would be optional.

City Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who led the fight against the commission's January action, said the modification is unacceptable. She said she was upset that the commission did not follow a recommendation made by a council task force to allow residents three false alarms without penalty.

"It's a step backward," Hahn said. "It was disappointing to me that they took the best recommendations, the best compromise, the best thinking" and did not use them. "But I haven't given up," she said.

According to the commission, an estimated 250,000 residents rely on alarms for protection in Los Angeles. Last year, the Los Angeles Police Department responded to 121,973 alarm calls, 92% of which were false.

Under the latest proposal, verified calls would remain priorities, but response to all others would be optional. Records of all alarms would be maintained.

"If they choose to respond, great," Police Commission President Rick Caruso said. "If they don't, it allows the area captains to track where some of the false alarms are coming from."

Caruso said he favors the new proposal, which addresses the concerns of residents who protested the January policy.

Commission officials say the policy would give officers in the LAPD's 18 local divisions the opportunity to respond based on local needs and knowledge of crime patterns.

The report's recommendations, to be considered by the full commission June 17, rejected a proposal by the Greater Los Angeles Security Alarm Assn. that would have required verification only after three false alarms at the same location within a year.

Though it was a change from the previous proposal, Caruso said the latest commission plan is not a compromise.

"We're not trying to do it to try and satisfy some council desire," he said. "It's what's best for the residents."

Times staff writer Jessica Garrison contributed to this report.