May 3, 2016

LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT

RALPH M. TERRAZAS
FIRE CHIEF

April 15, 2016

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. **16-043**

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM: Ralph M. Terrazas, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: UNWANTED ALARM PROGRAM UPDATE

FINAL ACTION:					
	_____ Approved	_____ Approved w/Corrections	_____ Withdrawn
	_____ Denied	_____ Received & Filed	_____ Other

SUMMARY
As a part of the 2015 Strategic Plan, the reduction of unwanted fire alarms is important to reduce overall call volume for response resources. Unwanted alarms have increased 21% since 2012 and continue to rise. To reduce the burden on response resources, a pilot program consisting of training field personnel, use of the Compliance Engine (Brycer LLC) to increase testing and repairs of alarm systems, community outreach and enforcement programs are currently in development for implementation to reduce unwanted fire alarms.

Reducing unwanted alarms has been an ongoing program since 1997 with the initial Training Bulletin highlighting burglar alarms as an escalating problem. There have been subsequent bulletins, reports and programs since to address unwanted alarms; however, the problem continues to increase.

This effort is a continuation of the initial FireStat LA metrics of using data to find solutions to the number of unwanted alarms by each battalion. The FireStat LA process allowed field resources to analyze the data and find solutions to the ongoing problem of unwanted alarms.

RECOMMENDATION
That the Board:
Receive and File.

FISCAL IMPACT
It is anticipated that there may be an increase of revenue to the general fund; however the amount cannot be accurately determined at this time.

DISCUSSION
Over the past several months, the Fire Prevention and Public Safety Bureau (FPB) have been continuing to study unwanted alarms. During these months, several sets of analysis have been performed including monthly analysis, a data analysis in Operations Central Bureau (OCB) and a high rise analysis determining the effect on Brycer LLC and reduction of alarms.

The FPB has met with the Unwanted Alarm Stakeholder group (Commissioner Glazier, Chief Vidovich, Chief Brodowy, Chief Wordin, Fire Administrator June Gibson, Carlos DeLaGuerra and Brian Sottile from the City Attorney's Office, Doug Tripp from Councilmember Englander's Office) have met on several occasions to discuss a proposed ordinance and other facets of the program focused to reduce unwanted alarms.

What the research has shown is that the Fire Code already has provisions for enforcement of malicious and malfunctioning alarms and clearly defines nuisance alarms. Each of these categories of alarms comprises the broader group of Unwanted Alarms. It was recommended that the Fire Code be amended in lieu of adopting an ordinance. The provisions for enforcement already exist in the Fire Code, adopting an ordinance would be duplicating what already exists in the Municipal Code.

The Fire Code needs additional provisions to include nuisance alarms as a part of the existing enforcement provisions similar to malicious and malfunctioning alarms under the Fire Code section 109.4. The Fire Code Revision Committee is in the process of developing the provisions for inclusion of unwanted alarm enforcement into the 2017 Fire Code Revisions.

Also, preliminary meetings with the City Attorney's Office have taken place to have the LAFD join the Administrative Citation Program (ACE). The Public Safety Committee has given approval for the Department, but no other approvals have been granted. As the program proceeds, additional approvals are needed from the Fire Commission and City Council for inclusion in the ACE program. The ACE Program will function to provide fines for locations with multiple unwanted alarms based on criteria in Appendix A.

The FPB conducted a data trial in Operations Central Bureau that demonstrated several trends. It was discovered in the data that there are large numbers of duplicate incident entries in the data set. The duplicate data is caused by units contacting Metro Fire Communications (MFC) and "taking" the response for the initial dispatched unit. This action causes additional dispatches that increase the overall number of responses, increasing workload for MFC.

Eliminating this double dispatch will reduce call volume and additional work at MFC.

Data Analysis	Count
Total number of AA, Bells, SD, WFlow City Wide during the trial	2926
Total number of AA, Bells, SD, WFlow in OCB (Includes Duplicate Dispatches)	934
Total AA, Bells, SD, WFlow in OCB without duplicate dispatches	516
Total count of alarm activations when system functioned as designed	105
Total number of alarms that meet unwanted alarm criteria	391
Number of locations that had 2 alarms at one location	40
Total number of locations with 3 or more alarms in one location	21
Total number of unwanted alarm incidents subject to enforcement	81
Total number of malicious alarm incidents	44
Total number of locations with 3 or more alarms where the system functioned as designed	30
Total number of violation locations after full analysis	9

When looking at the malicious incidents, which are required to have fire code violations written, no notices were written during the trial. Also, in looking at the malicious alarm coding showed that wrong codes were being used, which caused to review all 81 enforcement incidents for accuracy. It was found that 26 of the 81 incidents members entered wrong codes. In most cases of the 81 violation incidents, most units were returned by radio that would remove the location from being in violation. In the end of the analysis, only 9 of the 21 locations could be written violation citations or notices.

The main reason for the OCB trial was to improve the data set. It was determined in the preliminary data analysis that how members were using the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) codes were inaccurate. Also, the NFIRS codes were not specific enough to prove excessive nuisance alarms for enforcement. Further, the NFIRS system has codes that don't apply to the City of Los Angeles, but are used by members to document unwanted alarms. Changing the coding and simplifying data entry will lead to an improvement in documentation. Additional training in this area is needed to improve performance.

As a part of the trial, six new codes were programmed into the NFIRS system. The new codes were used by the trial stations and understanding the outcomes of nuisance, unwanted alarms were improved. However, it was found in the data that numerous errors are still occurring.

Six additional codes have been programmed into NFIRS to simplify data entry for first responders, but additional training on the codes is needed City-wide. This brings a total of 12 new codes specific to the ability to enforce excessive nuisance alarms. In the monthly analysis performed for the month of March 2016, it was found that members from outside OCB are using the new codes used for the trial without training.

Additional training is also necessary on notice writing and understanding the fire code as it relates to malicious, malfunctioning and nuisance alarms. Developing a Departmental Bulletin will also assist in the training Department members.
The key to the success of the proposed Unwanted Alarm Program is continued testing and tracking of systems using the Compliance Engine.

A small study was completed with a focus on repeat system activations in high rise buildings. The analysis was from 2014 and 2015 data looking at buildings that had generated alarms in 2014 and compared the same buildings to counts of alarms in 2015. Of the buildings in the analysis (200 of 762 buildings), 84% of the sample had significant reductions in alarms due to testing and repairs at the identified locations. Three locations in the sample saw an increase. The three buildings that had increases in alarms, the buildings were in violation and had not completed necessary repairs.

One of the additional comments made by members participating in the OCB trial was to create a "no send" category. Under state law this proposal is not possible in the sense of not sending resources when an alarm company calls 911. However, training of building security firms in the nuances of system components has the potential to reduce unwanted alarms.

A notification process is needed by the FPB to notify building owners and managers of locations of excessive malicious, malfunctioning or nuisance alarms for additional testing and education. These notifications will be in conjunction with Brycer LLC to have systems come into compliance and reduce unwanted alarms.

The development of community education in conjunction with a Community Stakeholder Group will also be a critical focus for reducing unwanted alarms. This effort also includes the development of Community Outreach tools (literature, videos, and public service announcements) to reduce unwanted alarms. These tools and education can be developed and implemented in conjunction with the Community Risk Reduction Unit. Also, for this program to expand and remain viable additional staffing will be needed. The additional staffing should be assigned to the FPB Compliance Unit.

PROGRAM TIMELINE

April 2016
- Develop training on new NFIRS codes and program provisions
- Continue to seek approval for the ACE Program
- Begin research into Community Education Program
- Continue tracking monthly unwanted alarm locations each month

May 2016
- Development of training program for the field
- Develop changes to the Fire Code
- Continue to seek approval for the ACE Program

- Develop Department Bulletin or Training Bulletin on Program
- Begin to develop Community Education Program
- Develop building owner notification process for unwanted alarms

June 2016
- Provide Field Training Program in each Bureau
- Continue development of Department Bulletin/Training Bulletin
- Continue development of Community Education Program
- Continue process to implement ACE Program
- Continue to make changes to Fire Code

July 2016
- Complete Field Training
- Continue development of Department Bulletin/Training Bulletin
- Continue development of Community Education Program
- Continue process to implement ACE Program
- Continue to make changes to Fire Code

August 2016
- Continue development of Department Bulletin/Training Bulletin
- Continue development of Community Education Program
- Continue process to implement ACE Program
- Continue to make changes to Fire Code

September 2016 to December 2016
- Study each Bureau for proper use of NFIRS Codes with a focus on enforcement and compliance
- Continue to finalize development and implement the Community Education Program
- Continue to finalize process to implement ACE Program
- Continue to finalize changes to the Fire Code

January 2017
- Implement new Fire Code Provisions, start Enforcement Citations for unwanted alarms on a monthly basis

July 2017
- Start Enforcement Citations for unwanted alarms on a yearly basis.

Timeline components are subject to change with the potential to add future items at a later date.

CONCLUSION
Reduction of unwanted alarms is critical to have response resources available for more emergent calls. The main goal with any prevention or risk reduction program is to gain support and compliance through community education and voluntary participation while

using code enforcement only when necessary. With continued effort, the Unwanted Alarm Program will be able to significantly reduce unwanted alarms throughout the City of Los Angeles.

Board Report prepared by Andrew Wordin, Battalion Chief, Administrative Section, Fire Prevention and Public Safety Bureau.

Appendix A
The FPB has established a process for determining when a building has excessive unwanted alarms. The process is as follows:

1. All data points must be present in the data set to determine if response was unwanted. (Date, Unit ID, First in district, en route, on scene and available CAD Time Stamps via the NFIRS System, Dispatch Code, NFIRS code, address). Incomplete NFIRS reports are not considered.

2. The dispatched, responding unit has to have an on scene time stamp. It is assumed that units responding to AA, Bells, SD and WFlow are only pushing on scene when actually at the scene.

3. Multiple units on single incident may not qualify as an excessive unwanted alarm

4. Dispatch Codes for consideration as an unwanted alarms are AA, Bells, SD and WFlow

5. Dispatches that start as AA, Bells, SD or WFlow that are changed to another dispatch code are not included in the data set.

6. NFIRS Code entries must reflect that the alarm was a malicious, malfunctioning or nuisance alarm. Alarm systems that function as designed are exempt from enforcement provisions. Improper code entries are not considered.