

October 3, 2017


LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



RALPH M. TERRAZAS
FIRE CHIEF

September 19, 2017

BOARD FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. 17-116

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners
FROM:  Ralph M. Terrazas, Fire Chief
SUBJECT: UNWANTED ALARM PROGRAM

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

SUMMARY

As directed by the Board of Fire Commissioners, the Fire Department is providing an update on the Unwanted Alarm Program, also known as the False Alarm Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board:
Review and file.

DISCUSSION

On August 23, 2017, the Public Safety Committee instructed the City Administrative Officer (CAO) to develop an implementation plan for the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) Unwanted Fire Alarm Program (the term "unwanted fire alarm" is used to be consistent with terminology contained in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 72 - National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code).

The goal of this implementation plan is to develop an unwanted fire alarm ordinance and piggyback onto a contract with another public agency for unwanted alarm cost recovery services. Simultaneously, the Fire Department has also developed a four-tired program to reduce Automatic Alarms.

LAFD UNWANTED ALARM PROGRAM

Until the City Ordinance that defines alarm fees and fines for unwanted alarms is drafted and approved, and prior to a contract being established with a third party vendor to track and bill unwanted alarms, the LAFD is instituting the following action plan:

Tier 1

- Develop new NFIRS data to capture specific automatic alarm data in order to determine the true cause of automatic alarms – **Completed, November, 2015**

Tier 2

- Implement new automatic alarm dispatch modification to dispatch the most appropriate resource and re-distribute a portion of the workload amongst companies assigned to Task Force Stations – **Completed, August 1, 2017**

Tier 3 (In progress)

- Implement the Administrative Enforcement Program (ACE) for excessive unwanted alarms. Research the first-in districts with the highest automatic alarm dispatches and identify buildings that have had three or more false/unwanted alarms in a month. Create a “Fire/Life Safety Notice” that advises the building owner to schedule a Regulation No. 4 test to bring their building into compliance
- Occupancies that are found liable for the Citation will be required to pay a fee:
 - 1st offence- \$100.00
 - 2nd offence- \$250.00
 - 3rd offence- \$250.00
- This program was initiated in February and March, 2017. To date, 46 occupancies received a notice and 31 have hearings scheduled with the City Attorney’s office:
 - 12 occupancies are Commercial Structures
 - 4 occupancies are High-Rise
 - 25 occupancies are Residential
 - 5 occupancies are Institutions
- As this program continues to develop, the ACE program will be directed at buildings that do not have Regulation No. 4 requirements, however, still have basic alarm systems. This will generate fees back to the City from the hearings generated by the ACE program.

Tier 4 (In progress)

The LAFD will institute a fire watch pilot program in order to abate unwanted alarms in buildings that are subject to a Regulation No. 4 test.

The FPB will create a 90-day pilot program for a fire watch program which will begin October 1, 2017, in Battalion 1, Battalion 17 and Battalion 18.

- Establish a fire watch program whereas companies on-scene of an automatic alarm will complete a thorough investigation of the alarm and attempt a reset.

- If the alarm system is malfunctioning, the fire company will issue a fire watch notice to a responsible party. The building will be placed on test via the alarm company.
- The fire company will then notify the FPB via a pre-established email of the building on fire watch.
- The FPB will initiate a thorough investigation by looking into the Compliance Engine.
- The FPB will complete a thorough "Fire Life Safety Notice."
- The notice will be sent to the proper building owner and to the Fire Station. The Compliance Engine will generate a report to require a Regulation No. 4 test be initiated forthwith, if applicable.
- Metro Fire Communication will be notified via the FPB of all buildings on fire watch. This information will be added to the dispatch information for all structure fire incidents responding to that building.
- The local Battalion Chief will also be notified via email.
- If the buildings do not repair their alarm systems within 30-days, the FPB will continue the legal enforcement process with the City Attorney's office to bring those buildings into compliance. This will reduce the automatic alarms to those buildings significantly. This will also generate fees back to the City from cases being filed for criminal charges.
- When the buildings fire protection systems are repaired, the fire watch will be discontinued.
- Metro Fire Communication and the local Battalion Chief will be notified to have the information notice removed from the dispatch teletype.

CONCLUSION

Currently, the LAFD responds to approximately 25,000 automatic alarms every year. Of these 25,000 automatic alarms, approximately 12,000 are deemed false prior to fire companies arriving on-scene. By implementing these recommendations, the Department will be able to increase public safety, firefighter safety and ensure compliance with the fire code.

Board report prepared by Rodd A. Souter, Battalion Chief, Fire Prevention and Public Safety Bureau.