



LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT

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FIRE CHIEF

June 4, 2018

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS FILE NO. 18-060

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM:  Ralph M. Terrazas, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: UNWANTED ALARM ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM - FIRST QUARTER
OF CALENDAR YEAR 2018

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 Withdrawn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

In calendar year 2017, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) responded to 34,684 automatic alarms. LAFD resources arrived on-scene 71.13% (24,669 incidents) of the time and were canceled prior to arriving on-scene a total of 10,015 incidents. The percentage of those 34,684 automatic alarms that resulted in fires was 0.63%. This equated to 214 actual fires. For the first quarter of 2018, the LAFD responded to 9,339 automatic alarms.

The Fire Prevention Bureau (FPB) is continuing to develop the Unwanted Alarm Enforcement Program (UAEP). The UAEP will increase enforcement, recuperate cost and reduce the number of automatic alarms, bells, smoke detectors and water flow alarms in the City of Los Angeles. The initial UAEP consisted of the following steps:

1. Developed a three-month trial program in Battalions 1, 17 and 18 to place occupancies on fire watch when the fire alarm system is unable to reset. The field resources utilized lafd.firewatch@lacity.org to notify the FPB. The FPB investigated the cause of the alarm and worked towards repairing the system. During the trial period, the FPB received 14 fire watch notices from field resources. The results of the trial program are listed as follows:
 - Six buildings were sent to a Regulation No. 4 Hearing Officer in the City Attorney's Office. All six of the buildings have been repaired and are functioning correctly.
 - Eight buildings have been repaired by completing a new Regulation No. 4 test on their systems and are functioning correctly.

2. The FPB instituted a City-wide policy whereas field resources utilize the FPB referral form to notify the FPB when they encounter a faulty fire alarm system. The criterion to utilize the form is a fire alarm occurring three times in one 24-hour shift and/or three similar alarms to the same occupancy in a 30-day period. During the first quarter of 2018, (beginning February 19, 2018) the FPB received **33** requests from field resources. The referrals were vetted by members assigned to the Research and Legal Units and forwarded to the most appropriate Section within the FPB. To date, 26 occupancies have been repaired and are functioning properly, a 78% improvement.
3. The FPB runs monthly audits on unwanted fire alarms City-wide. Using the criteria of three or more automatic fire alarms dispatched in a one-month period, the following statistics were identified:
 - January 2018 - 196 occupancies qualified as unwanted alarm
 - February 2018 - 173 occupancies qualified as unwanted alarm
 - March 2018 - 175 occupancies qualified as an unwanted alarm
4. The FPB is working with our Los Angeles World Airport (LAWA) partners to decrease automatic alarms at the Airport.
5. The FPB has opened dialogue with alarm companies to receive their input on how to reduce automatic alarms. This is especially prevalent on rainy days.
6. FPB is running an audit to inquire how many burglar alarms are sent to LAFD dispatch and dispatched as an automatic alarm.
7. Develop an ordinance (similar to the Los Angeles Police Department's unwanted burglar alarm program) to establish cost recovery associated with unwanted alarms.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board:
Receive and File.

FISCAL IMPACT

The fiscal impact is unknown until an unwanted fire alarm ordinance is drafted and approved.

DISCUSSION

The UAEP has been developed based on best practices and analytical research. As the development of the UAEP continues, additional revisions and research will be needed.

Goals of the Unwanted Alarm Enforcement Program:

1. Enforce the current fire code to reduce unwanted fire alarms.

2. Improve overall public safety by increasing the availability of fire resources.
3. Support Regulation No. 4 by ensuring compliance with inspection, testing and maintenance of fire protection systems.
4. Recuperate cost recovery efforts.

Specific Program Components:

1. **Fire Watch Trial Program:** The FPB initiated a 3-month trial program in Battalion 1, Battalion 17 and Battalion 18. There was a total of six fire stations (two per Battalion) enrolled in the trial program. The trial period began November 1, 2017 and ended January 31, 2018. During the trial period, the FPB received 14 fire watch notices from field resources. The results of the trial program are listed as follows:
 - Eight buildings were sent to a Regulation No. 4 Hearing Officer in the City Attorney's Office. All eight of the buildings have been repaired and are functioning correctly.
 - Six buildings have been repaired by completing a new Regulation No. 4 test on their systems and are functioning correctly.
2. **City-wide Referral Program - Unwanted Alarms:** Effective February 19, 2018. Field resources will utilize the FPB referral form whenever they are dispatched to an automatic alarm to the same building three times in one 24-hour shift or more than three times in a 30-day period. The FPB will initiate an investigation and bring the building into compliance. For the first quarter, the FPB received **33** referrals for unwanted fire alarms and 26 of those occupancies have been repaired. The remaining seven occupancies are undergoing further investigation by the Legal Unit. A total of 78% of the initial 33 occupancies were brought into compliance.
3. **Using CAD and NFIRS data, run a monthly audit on automatic alarms, water flows, smoke detectors and bells:** The FPB will utilize the same criteria as item #2. The FPB will determine the best course of action to reduce the automatic alarms. Actions taken are as listed as follows:
 - Brycer – Review for compliance
 - City Attorney Hearings
 - Previous Life/ Safety Notices-Review the history
 - New Notice Written - Building to comply with all fire/life safety requirements
4. **LAWA:** Working with our LAWA partners, the FPB is researching changing duct alarms to supervisory, instead of alarm signal. In addition, we are working with the Central Utilities Plant (CUP) to inquire if it is feasible to dispatch maintenance crew members to work areas inside the airport to verify an alarm prior to dispatching LAFD resources.

5. **Rain Events:** During the month of March 2018, the amount of dispatches to automatic alarms increased by 17.22% from those dispatched in February 2018. This is possibly related to the 3-day rain event that occurred on March 21, 22 and 23. During that 3-day period, there were 389 automatic alarms. The FPB has opened dialogue with alarm companies to request their input on how to reduce automatic alarms. At our last meeting, a representative from the alarm community mentioned that new alarm panels have built in self-checking systems that will send a reset signal out 10 times in a 120 second time period. If the alarms resets anytime within that 120 seconds, it will not send an alarm signal to the central station. This could decrease automatic alarms significantly. We have already begun a public service campaign by educating the industry on self-checking systems by working closely with the Community Liaison Office.
6. **Burglar Alarms:** The FPB has initiated an audit to determine how many burglar alarms are dispatched as automatic fire alarms. The FPB will work closely with the Executive Director of the LAPD to reduce these unwanted alarms.
7. **Unwanted Alarm Ordinance:** The LAFD has prepared a working draft ordinance to amend applicable provisions of the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) that would incorporate the characteristics of fire alarm systems, fire code provisions, fee schedule and administrative processes. This draft, providing a very basic structure, has been transmitted to the City Attorney to initiate discussion toward development of a comprehensive unwanted fire alarm ordinance.

CONCLUSION

By implementing these recommendations, the Department will be able to increase public safety, firefighter safety and ensure compliance with the fire code. In addition, the Department will establish a new City ordinance that will provide cost recovery of the resources associated with responding to recurring unwanted alarms.

Board report prepared by Kristin M. Crowley, Deputy Chief, Fire Prevention and Public Safety Bureau.