

How to Create an Alarm User Awareness School for Your Municipality

Created by the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) and the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA)

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This document has been created as a joint effort between the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) and the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA). It can be utilized by the local law enforcement agency's alarm unit manager to create an Alarm User Awareness School. Alarm industry members are encouraged to share this information with local alarm unit managers and assist them in creating an Alarm User Awareness School.

What is an Alarm User Awareness School?

All studies of the false alarm problem that have ever been conducted report one common fact: alarm users cause a vast majority of false alarms. Whether by forgetting their disarm code, leaving a door open, or forgetting to let the new cleaning company know about the system, user errors can all be prevented. One of the most successful programs to assist alarm users is the Alarm User Awareness School.

An Alarm User Awareness School is a program that is conducted by the municipal alarm ordinance manager and is designed to educate alarm users about the costs of false alarms, ways to prevent false alarms, and the responsibilities and fines included in local alarm ordinances. The school typically teaches the basic functions of alarm system components, easy maintenance procedures that the alarm user may utilize to prevent alarms due to equipment malfunction, and the monitoring procedures used by the central station. The alarm ordinance manager may include officer response, complacency and risk to the officers and citizens.

In many of the municipalities utilizing the Alarm User Awareness School, an alarm user is given the opportunity to waive a false alarm fine if he or she attends the school. Several jurisdictions are using this model to develop innovative ways to reduce false alarms, educate alarm users and save money and resources. Most jurisdictions have found that users welcome the alarm school concept as it provides opportunities to build positive relationships with the industry and police department, save money on fines, learn more about their systems, and network with others in their community.

The Benefits of an Alarm User Awareness School

In most cases, over 90 percent of Alarm User Awareness School attendees never have another false alarm. This is because many subscribers have communication problems with their alarm installing or monitoring company and the program gives users answers and solutions to their specific problem or question. The program also encourages users to find out what caused an alarm activation, to try to remedy the situation immediately and to be responsible for their system.

One warning, however: an Alarm User Awareness School can never replace the job that each and every alarm company must do to train its customers after the installation and over the life of the relationship with the customer. The Alarm User Awareness School provides a one-on-one opportunity to ask questions about alarm company practices, equipment problems, or poor service. The alarm ordinance manager may suggest options for the user to discuss with their alarm company.

A well-written and efficiently enforced ordinance has been proven to be the most effective tool for reducing and preventing false alarms. A good alarm ordinance sets up a false alarm reduction unit in the local police department and sets up permitting requirements for alarm systems. Police response to alarm dispatches is tracked by the alarm unit. After a certain number of false alarm dispatches (typically two), a fine is imposed on the user of the system and that fine may increase with each subsequent false alarm or may be a cost recovery fee.

Several localities encourage the user to attend the Alarm User Awareness School by allowing a waiver of one fine or fee if they attend. Many jurisdictions allow an alarm user to attend the school at any time. This includes users who may have just purchased an alarm system and simply want to learn about the process and stay out of the excessive false alarm category. Attendance may also include users who have had one or two false alarms, as well as users with multiple false alarms. The school outline can be structured to accommodate all of the users mentioned. Users who have not had multiple false alarms should be encouraged to attend the class. By allowing all users to attend the school, false alarm prevention can be accomplished at all levels.

How to get an Alarm User Awareness School Started

You can get started today! As soon as you can find a location and instructors your jurisdiction can get an Alarm User Awareness School started. In order to have a waiver for a fee or fine when a user attends an Alarm User Awareness School in your locality, it must be provided for in your local alarm ordinance. The provision in your ordinance may be no more than one sentence that requires the creation of a school and allows for false alarm fines to be waived for graduates of the school.

While there are certain steps that are common to all Alarm User Awareness Schools, false alarms are a local problem, and so are the solutions. Therefore, the most important step in creating an Alarm User Awareness School is forming a working relationship on a local level between the municipal alarm ordinance manager, local alarm companies and the local alarm association. It is upon this three-legged foundation that your Alarm User Awareness School will be built. Contact your local alarm association or a local alarm company representative to assist teaching the school. If you don't know who your local contact call or e-mail the NBF AA at (301) 585-1855 or e-mail at fact@alarm.org. By utilizing the alarm industry, the school provides a united front to the alarm user, and the user learns that false alarms are a problem for both the law enforcement agency and the alarm industry. The local alarm association or local alarm company representative may also be of assistance in gathering alarm equipment to display at the school. Some of this equipment may include: an RJ-Jack, batteries, PIR, glass break sensor, panic buttons, door and window contacts, keypad and a smoke detector. By providing a sample of the various components, users can identify with each piece of equipment as it is explained in the school.

The next step is drafting an outline for your new school. Alarm User Awareness Schools run in length anywhere from two to four hours, so plan accordingly. Your outline should cover: the problem and cost of false alarms, the local impact of false alarms, tools that your locality is implementing through its local ordinance to reduce false alarms, technical information about alarm systems including specific operating instructions and examples, common causes and solutions to user errors, and the users responsibility to properly operate their alarm system. **Appendix A** provides a sample overall program outline, as well as the detailed outline used for the False Alarm School taught by the Phoenix Police Department, in Arizona.

Advertising the Alarm User Awareness School can be extremely important. Many of the local alarm companies, along with the local alarm association, will distribute flyers to their alarm users. Flyers should be included with all false alarm warnings, assessment letters and permit packets. Local media should also be used.

But an outline is not a school. The most effective schools are hands-on, interactive, and fast-paced. This is where the instructor from the alarm industry, such as a representative from a local company or the local alarm association, can assist. Rather than having an instructor give a three-hour slide show on the false alarm problem, school attendees should be exposed to a dynamic and interactive curriculum. The outline should be kept to as short a duration as possible, and be of a generic nature

when discussing alarm companies, alarm equipment or central stations. The instructors should not mention names of alarm companies or specific brands of equipment.

The National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association does have a slide presentation for Alarm User Awareness Schools that can be utilized. **Appendix B** is a printout of the PowerPoint presentation that is also available to download off the NBFAA web site. Visit the false alarm prevention section of www.alarm.org.

Also, the course should include plenty of alarm system devices that can be used to show examples of the correct and incorrect methods to be used in the proper operation of the system. The sessions should be hands-on, with attendees practicing the proper operation of a system right in the classroom. A brief description in very basic terms of how each component is activated can help the user to better understand what may cause a false alarm, and what to watch for.

The school should be held in a relaxed atmosphere, and encourage interaction, questions and examples. An open forum provides for discussions on a variety of problems that may be common among the participants. Print handouts for the attendees to take home with them. A simple packet can contain an overview of the school, and may provide additional material for the user to read, and refer to as well.

Finally, attendees must be encouraged to dialog with their alarm company and find out how they can become part of the false alarm solution. Many members of FARA have implemented Alarm User Awareness Schools. For more information, contact FARA at (301) 279-1917.

Just one piece of the puzzle

An Alarm User Awareness School can have a significant impact on your locality's false alarm rate. But it is only one piece of an overall false alarm reduction program. Alarm unit managers, alarm companies and alarm users are all part of the solution.

For more information on IQ Alarm Company Certification, the FARA/NBFAA Model Ordinance, the Model States Report, False Alarm Reduction Summits and many more false alarm reduction publications, law enforcement personnel should contact the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) at (301) 279-1917 and alarm dealers should contact the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA) at (301) 585-1855.

How to Create an Alarm User Awareness School in Your Municipality

Appendix A

PLEASE NOTE:

Patti Rea and the Phoenix Police Department Alarm Unit provided the following information and has graciously agreed to provide this information to any law enforcement agency that would like to start an Alarm User Awareness School. All of the following information is available on disk so you can customize the outline and information for your own Alarm User Awareness School. For a free disk containing the following information in Microsoft Word format, please contact NBFAA's Government Relations Dept. at 301-585-1855 or fact@alarm.org.

FALSE ALARMS PREVENTION PROGRAM

Offered by the

Phoenix Police Department

- * Provides reasons for false alarm activations and ways to prevent them.
- * Educational information for alarm system users.
- * Includes certificate for waiver of \$74.00 False Alarm Assessment.
- * Cost is \$10.00 per subscriber.
- * REFER TO SECTION 10-76.01 OF THE PHOENIX CITY CODE REGARDING THE FALSE ALARM PREVENTION PROGRAM AND IT'S LIMITATIONS.*
- * YOU MUST R.S.V.P FOR ANY CLASS.

For more information call the Alarm Unit at

534-0322

BENEFITS OF A FALSE ALARM PREVENTION PROGRAM

- ◆ The program provides a one-on-one opportunity to ask questions about police procedures, alarm company practices, equipment problems, etc.
- ◆ The subscribers hear that false alarms are a problem from both the police department and alarm industry members
- ◆ Provides a united front since the teaching of the classes are conducted by both police personnel and alarm industry members
- ◆ Provides suggestions for monitoring, verification and maintenance procedures that the alarm subscribers may never hear from anywhere else
- ◆ Since the classes are attended by businesses, churches, residences and schools, it provides an open forum for discussions on a variety of problems that may be common among the participants
- ◆ By attending the class, the alarm subscriber receives a certificate to waive a false alarm assessment
- ◆ If the program is successful, very few certificates need to be submitted because they have learned the prevention techniques that apply to their situation
- ◆ Is very proactive
- ◆ Allows an option for the subscriber, they can either attend the program or pay the assessment

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: _____

Az. Burglar & Fire Alarm Assoc. Instructor: _____

Phoenix Police Department Instructor: _____

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 materials 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

Please evaluate this program according to the following criteria:

	Excellent	Great	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Amount of information presented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classroom facility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of handouts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of visual aids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

General Comments:



CITY OF PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT

FALSE ALARM PREVENTION PROGRAM OUTLINE

Introduction

- Costs of false alarms to the city
- Causes complacency and danger for false responses
- Introduction of PD representative and alarm Association Representative
- False Alarm Reduction Video

Equipment Maintenance

- Individual components and overview with Demo Board
- Maintenance and yearly inspection of system
- Overview of items on pages 3 through 7 (see Instructor's Outline)

Basic Reasons For False Alarms

- Frequent trouble zones of system
- Training of users
- Callback and Cancellation Procedures

City of Phoenix Alarm Systems Ordinance Over-view and
Phoenix Police Department Response Procedures

- Reason for ordinance
- 365-day consecutive period and false alarm assessments
- Appeal procedures
- Alarm Subscriber Permits and annual renewal
- Certificates and waiver of assessments from program
- Police Response procedures and Notification Card

Question and Answer Session

Handouts:

- False Alarm Brochures
- Alarm Assessment Certificate
- False Alarm Prevention Manual

FALSE ALARM PREVENTION PROGRAM
Police Department Instructor Outlines

1) Introduction:

The purpose of the class is to explain how false alarms commonly occur and ways to prevent them. The instructor will show some common user errors and give equipment maintenance tips. The City Code will be explained along with the subscriber and alarm company's responsibilities.

(Pass out handouts and explain that article is good example as to why maintenance and procedures are good things to keep in mind. Also ask them to read over Installation Guidelines, which were put together by the Phoenix Police Department and Arizona Burglar & Fire Alarm Association. Have them check with their alarm company to make sure they are in compliance with these guidelines)

2) Show 30 second video "Public Service Announcement" and 8 minute False Alarm Prevention video.

3) Introduce instructor, who is on the board of the Arizona Burglar and Fire Alarm Association.

Instructor will refer to letter and picture-pass picture around.

Instructor will cover items on exhibit board, along with individual pieces of equipment and cover pages 3 through 6.

BREAK (if time allows-should be 45-60 mins into class)

4) Briefly explain City Code: In effect since 1977. Written based on input from alarm companies, businesses and various City departments. The permit requirement was added in 1990.

In Fiscal year 90/91, 20,462 active accounts.
Total alarm calls: 95,250 False Alarm calls: 78,324 (82%)
Cost per call was \$48 per call
Cost for year was approximately \$3.7 million

In Fiscal year 95/96, 56,900 active accounts.
Total alarm calls: 85,313 False Alarm calls: 53,641 (63%)
Cost per call \$74 per call
Cost for year was approximately \$4 million.

The number of alarms per system has gone from 3.8 alarms to .77 and has started to climb again.

The code is also designed so that you, your alarm company and the Police Department can work together to eliminate false alarms.

(EXPLAIN ONLY BASIC AREAS OF THE CODE)

Section 10-66

Applicability-does not apply to car alarms or fire alarms.

Section 10-67-Definitions

Act of God- something that cannot be prevented by human care, skill or foresight. Monsoon Season does not fall under this definition because we are aware it occurs yearly, so system should be checked and batteries should be changed to prevent false alarms due to power surges/power outages that occur during these storms.

Common cause- false alarms which have occurred within 72 hours of each other due to same equipment problem (example, motion detector, battery, contacts), the problem was fixed, written documentation is sent to the Police Department stating what the problem was and what was fixed and no additional false alarms generated within 30 days due to the same problem.

Section 10-69-Alarm Business Duties

Alarm business duties- Please read to make sure alarm company is complying, if not call them.

Your alarm company should have installed a system which was compatible with your environment at the time of installation. If additions or changes have been made or you will be making some in the future, notify your alarm company immediately (remodeling, pets, plants).

A responsible party is required to respond within 30 minutes of the alarm activation. Tell your alarm who will be responding, an estimated time of arrival and vehicle description so they can advise the Police Department. If the officer is aware someone is enroute, they will wait, unless there is emergency traffic/calls.

Also make sure that your responsible party list is kept current with your alarm company and the Police Department.

10-70-Alarm Subscriber Duties

Make sure doors and windows are locked and secured.

10-75 through 10-77-Appeal process (EXPLAIN 365-DAY COUNT)

One to two false alarms = Warning Notice is mailed to subscriber and alarm company. On first alarm activation, find out what caused the alarm and correct it, do not wait. There is no charge for the first or second false alarm provided that the subscriber has a valid Alarm Subscriber Permit. Without permit, first and second alarm are charged \$74.

Third and up = Initial Notice is mailed to subscriber and alarm company.

If there is no written response or Certificate of Completion from the Prevention Program is not submitted within 20 days of the notice an invoice will be issued jointly to subscriber and alarm company. No further appeal under City Code is allowed once an invoice is issued.

If a response is received or the Certificate is received, a Police Review will be mailed to you and your alarm company.

If you or your alarm company do not agree with the Police Review, there is an additional appeal to a Hearing Officer. The hearing officer is an independent party who can either reverse our decision, find the alarm company solely liable, the subscriber solely liable or leave the assessment joint.

The certificate will waive one \$74 assessment if used within the 20 days of the INITIAL NOTICE or 10 days of the POLICE REVIEW. A certificate cannot be used once an invoice has been issued. The certificate is good for 1 year only.

10-86-Alarm Subscriber Permits

The permit number is required to be given by alarm company at time of alarm call. When the permit number is entered, all the information from the permit comes up on the computer screen for the 9-1-1 operator and also the officer. This information will let the officer know if there are any hazards, the names and phone numbers for the responsible parties, etc. This will provide a quicker response.

Annual Renewal cost \$15.

Permits are not transferable. If you move you will need to apply for new permit. If business or residence is sold, new owner will need to apply for new permit.

FALSE ALARM NOTIFICATION CARDS - The officers should be leaving one, but are not required to. If a notification card is not left, they either don't have one or there was nowhere to leave it. Call your precinct to ask why officers are not leaving cards.

NOTE: REMEMBER TO HAVE SUBSCRIBERS COMPLETE THE EVALUATION FORM BEFORE THEY LEAVE.

FALSE ALARM SCHOOL ABFAA INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES

Use equipment and demo board for the following:

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 the most common equipment reason for false alarm activations.

DOOR AND WINDOW CONTACTS:

Be sure the door or window is completely closed and locked.

If an unlocked door is opened by a person, wind, dog, etc., the alarm is activated and the police respond, 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:

- 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 not 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 lens 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 clean.
- 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 devices must be done by your alarm company
- Visually inspect any exposed wire for damage. Repairs for wiring should 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 and 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 on 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:

- City Code requires annual inspection of the alarm system.
- 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 the Phoenix area, the life is usually 2-3 years. This is due to our extreme summer heat and frequent power fluctuations. 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 your alarm company for troubleshooting ideas.
- Renew the City of Phoenix Alarm Subscriber 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. Preventative maintenance can save false alarms, trouble and expensive repairs when done by a trained technician.
- Verify the cancellation procedures with the central station.

CITY OF PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT

ALARM UNIT

FALSE ALARM PREVENTION

False alarms are a problem for everyone, the alarm subscriber/alarm owner, the alarm company and the police departments. Several cities throughout the country have implemented no response policies, due to excessive false alarms. False alarms cost the City of Phoenix over **5.1 million dollars** during the Fiscal Year 1998/99. With the growing number of alarm systems used throughout the City of Phoenix, all alarm subscribers or alarm owners must be aware of how to correctly operate their alarm system. As of July 1, 1999, the City of Phoenix had over 83,000 active alarm systems. If every subscriber had “just a few” false alarms per year, the Phoenix Police Department would be responding to over 160,000 false alarms. At a cost of \$74.00 per call, this is a waste of taxpayer's money.

During Fiscal Year 1998/99, the Phoenix Police Department received 106,293 calls to respond to alarm activations. 62,472 of these calls were false alarms. Only 7,795 resulted in valid calls, such as attempt burglaries, criminal damage or criminal activity.

In addition to the personnel costs to the City of Phoenix taxpayers, there are other items that affect 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.

False alarms must be reduced.

The City of Phoenix Police Department Alarm Unit is constantly striving to educate alarm subscribers/alarm owners and alarm companies to eliminate false alarms. In order to accomplish this goal, the City of Phoenix 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
- 3) Brochures identifying the most common false alarm problems and ways to prevent their occurrences
- 4) A False Alarm Reduction Plan
- 5) Helpful tips on False Alarm Warnings
- 6) A False Alarm Notification Card

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

The Phoenix Police Department does allow an alarm company to call the 9-1-1 center to cancel a burglary alarm call. Panic and Holdup alarms are not canceled. Due to the cancellation policy, 36,019 calls for response were canceled after the subscriber contacted the central station with the proper identification. Every central station has different verification and cancellation policies, and each subscriber should contact his/her alarm company for instructions on canceling an alarm activation.

When the Phoenix Police Department 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 operator answers the initial call and obtains the necessary information that officers need to respond and check the location. The call is then sent to a Radio dispatcher for an assignment to an available patrol unit. Under normal circumstances, a minimum of two patrol officers is sent to each alarm activation. Contrary to popular belief, they are not necessarily dispatched from the precinct, 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, a K-9 Unit or the Air Unit may be called for assistance in checking the premises for suspects. The Phoenix 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 Phoenix 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. On the back of the False Alarm Notification Card, there are several helpful hints to try to prevent further false alarm occurrences.

Phoenix City Code **requires** a responsible party from either the alarm subscriber/alarm owner or the alarm company to meet the officers at the scene of an activated alarm to assist the officers in determining what activated the alarm system. Only the business 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 every alarm activation. It is the responsibility of the alarm subscriber/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 the most common equipment reason for false alarm activations.

DOOR AND WINDOW CONTACTS:

Be sure the door or window is completely closed and locked. If an unlocked door is opened by a person, wind, dog, etc., the alarm is activated and the police respond, 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:

- 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 not 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 lens 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 clean.
- 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 devices must be done by your alarm company
- Visually inspect any exposed wire for damage. Repairs for wiring should 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 and 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 on 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:

- City Code requires annual inspection of the alarm system.
- 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 the Phoenix area, the life is usually 2-3 years. This is due to our extreme summer heat and frequent power fluctuations. 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 your alarm company for troubleshooting ideas.
- Renew the City of Phoenix Alarm Subscriber 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. Preventative 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 assessable false alarms under the City Code and are not removed by the City Code from the pending assessment for any reason.

USER ERROR

Make sure everyone who has access (this also means keys) to the premises knows 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 includes 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 are 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. This is **REQUIRED** by City Code.

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 monsoon weather, double check all doors and windows to make sure they will not blow open.

This section is a **brief summary** of the Phoenix City Code, Article IX on Alarm Systems. It is the responsibility of alarm subscribers and alarm owners to read the copy of the City Code included in this manual, to ensure that they understand all sections and penalties of the City Code.

The Phoenix City Code on Alarm Systems is unique. It holds alarm subscribers and their alarm company jointly and severally responsible for excessive false alarm activations. This is designed to develop a level of communication between the subscriber and the alarm company upon the first false alarm activation. 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.

The Phoenix City Code outlines responsibilities for both alarm companies and alarm subscribers/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 subscriber/alarm owner and to instruct them on the importance of preventing false alarms. The alarm subscriber/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 subscribers/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 Phoenix licenses alarm companies and alarm agents. The licensing application requires a background check on the individuals listed on the application, and is renewed each year. If an applicant has been convicted of a Felony, has knowingly and willfully given false information on the application, or if the applicant has violated any provisions of the City Code, the Alarm Business License and/or the Alarm Agent License will not be approved. Upon notification of an alarm business who has not applied for and received an Alarm Business License, the Phoenix Police Department Alarm Unit sends a certified notice to the unlawful company. If the alarm business does not comply with the City Code, the alarm business may be prosecuted for operating as an unlawful alarm business.

The City of Phoenix also requires an Alarm Subscriber Permit application for each alarm subscriber/alarm owner, for each alarm location. The Alarm Subscriber Permit is updated on an annual basis, and allows for any changes to the permit application each year. Failure to apply for and receive an Alarm Subscriber Permit can result in an assessment of \$74.00 for the first and second false alarm activations. Continued operation of the alarm system without obtaining the required permit is unlawful. 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.

The Phoenix City Code assess alarm subscribers/alarm owners and their alarm company 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, assessments may be imposed. The assessment for each false alarm activation is \$74.00. This is the cost of patrol response to the false alarm activation. There are appeal procedures once an Initial Notice of Assessment has been issued. The Initial Notice of Assessment outlines the appeal process and guidelines. There is a twenty day allowance for a written response to appeal the pending assessments. If an appeal is not received, any assessments issued pursuant to the City Code are due and final as invoiced. There is **not** an appeal process after the invoice has been issued.

An appeal to an 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 an Act of God, Common-Cause, and telephone line problems. Please refer to Sections 10-67 Definitions and 10-76 Police Review of False Alarms, of the Phoenix City Code, included with this manual.

Appeals may proceed to a Burglar Alarm Hearing process. The City Auditor is the Hearing Officer. The officer will determine whether the alarm pending assessment is false or valid. Upon the determination that the alarm is false, the Hearing Officer will determine which party will receive the assessment. The Hearing Officer may rule that the assessment is joint and several (between the alarm subscriber and the alarm company), that the subscriber is solely responsible for the assessment or that the alarm company is solely responsible for the assessment. Once the Hearing Officer has issued a ruling, an invoice is issued to the appropriate party.

The Phoenix Police Department Alarm Unit is available to answer any questions about alarm systems, the City Code, police procedures and dispatch procedures.

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

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

How to Create an Alarm User Awareness School in Your Municipality

Appendix B

PLEASE NOTE:

NBFAA's PowerPoint slide presentation for your Alarm User Awareness School is available to be downloaded from the Internet in the false alarm prevention section of www.alarm.org or by contacting NBFAA's Government Relations Department at 301-585-1855 or fact@alarm.org.