

## **CITY OF SUFFOLK**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS about the ALARM ORDINANCE, ALARM REGISTRATION AND FALSE ALARM FEES**

#### **Is there a value to owning an alarm system?**

Yes, an alarm system can bring you a sense of security and peace of mind and is effective with proper installation, adequate training and regular maintenance.

#### **Are false alarms a problem?**

Yes they are. Across the nation, the growth of alarm system ownership has resulted in a tremendous amount of false alarms. The response to false alarms has created an additional burden on our law enforcement agencies. Nationwide, approximately 98% or more of all the burglar alarms police respond on are false.

False alarms divert officers from places where they're genuinely needed. They can delay responses to calls that may be real and can remove our officers from proactive crime prevention activities.

#### **Why did the City adopt a false alarm ordinance?**

The City is handling more than 6,000 false alarm calls a year. If the Police Department continued with the same alarm response policy over the next three years, officers would respond to over 18,000 alarm calls, of which more than 94% are false. This is very costly to all the City taxpayers.

A number of jurisdictions across the nation have also adopted false alarm ordinances and permitting as a way to reduce their false alarms.

#### **What does the City hope to accomplish by enforcing the false alarm ordinance?**

The City wants to substantially reduce the number of false alarms that the Police Department handles. Results from other cities that hold the alarm

user accountable for the maintenance and operation of their alarm systems have successfully reduced the number of false alarm calls.

The alarm ordinance is based on an alarm model that was developed by the national alarm industry in conjunction with the National Sheriff's Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. The Police Department developed the ordinance with the assistance of the local alarm industry.

### **If I have just one or two false alarms a year is that a problem?**

As an individual alarm user, if the Suffolk Police Department responds to your home or business just once or twice a year on a false alarm, it doesn't seem like a major problem, but it is. The use of our officers has a value attached to it. We all count on our Police Department to be there when we need them. If every alarm user believed that it is okay to just have a few false alarms each year, then that would result in thousands of additional unnecessary calls for our Police Department. That is a burden placed on all taxpayers in the City.

### **Who is required to have an alarm registration?**

Anyone operating an alarm system whether monitored or local is required to obtain an alarm registration. A separate alarm registration is required for each alarm site having a distinct address or business. Alarm Systems **not required** to obtain a registration include those installed on an auto, on one's person or an alarm system which will not emit a signal either audible or visible from the outside of the building or residence but is designed solely to alert the occupants of a building or residence.

### **How do I register my alarm?**

The ordinance requires alarm companies to provide the Alarm Administrator with a list of all their existing alarm users within the City limits. You will then be notified by mail to register your alarm. New alarm systems are required to have a valid alarm registration within 7 days of the installation or

activation. You can also access an online site to download alarm registration forms or renewal online. [www.atbservices.com/suffolk](http://www.atbservices.com/suffolk)

### **What is the cost of an annual alarm registration?**

The cost of an alarm registration is \$25 for the initial registration year and \$10 for annual renewal for either a residential or a commercial alarm site. No refund of a registration or registration renewal fee will be made.

### **If I plan to cancel my alarm service in the next couple of months do I still need to register my alarm?**

If your alarm service will not be cancelled within thirty days of receiving the notice to register your alarm system, then you are required to have a valid alarm registration to operate your alarm system.

### **Where do all the registration fees and alarm service fees go?**

All monies generated from the ordinance are dedicated to the City to cover the cost of administrating the alarm program and to recovery some of the cost of the Police Department's services lost to false alarm response. There is no "profit" for the City.

### **Why registration fees and annual renewals?**

Registration fees pay for the administration of the alarm program. The alarm program structure that is established to educate alarm users about reducing false alarms, tracking false alarm calls, billing alarm service fees, providing online services and the availability to answer your questions via a phone call is an on going yearly function. Whether or not you have a false alarm this service function is necessary for all alarm users. The City of Suffolk has approximately 3,500 alarm sites to track and 45 alarm companies and monitoring centers both in and out of State that they must coordinate and interact with on alarms.

## **The ordinance requires Enhanced Call Verification (ECV), what's that?**

The alarm industry developed Enhanced Call Verification (ECV) as an effective way to avoid sending law enforcement to a false alarm. It requires that your alarm company make at least two separate calls in verifying your alarm systems activation signal prior to contacting the Police. Your alarm company will first call your home or business where your alarm is occurring and if they fail to contact a responsible party they will then call a second number that you have provided them such as a cell phone number. The whole process usually takes less than 60 to 90 seconds.

As the alarm user, you are familiar with any type of activity occurring at the alarm site such as guests, home repairs, cleaning crews, real estate agents, employees opening or closing times etc. This gives you two or more opportunities to cancel accidental alarm activations before requesting a Police response.

Many alarm companies and monitoring centers have voluntarily implemented ECV on their own since it has proven to reduce false alarms and help their customers avoid false alarm fees. You can contact your alarm company to request ECV and add provide additional contact phone numbers for responsible parties.

### **(ECV PROCEDURE ARE FOR BURGLAR ALARMS ONLY – NOT ROBBERY, PANIC, MEDICAL OR FIRE)**

#### **What is the fee amount for a false alarm?**

The false alarm fee for Burglar Alarms within your one year registration period:

**1<sup>st</sup>** alarm no charge, **2<sup>nd</sup>** \$50, **3<sup>rd</sup>** \$100, **4<sup>th</sup>** or more \$150

Fees for Robbery and Panic false alarms:

**1<sup>st</sup>** alarm no charge, **2<sup>nd</sup>** \$100, **3<sup>rd</sup>** \$150, **4<sup>th</sup>** or more \$250

The national average for false alarms per alarm user each year is less than one.

#### **Can my alarm monitoring center cancel a burglar/intrusion alarm that they have called into the communications center?**

Yes they can. You will not be charged for a false alarm if the cancellation notice is received prior to the officer's arrival at the alarm site. Only your alarm monitoring center can cancel an alarm burglar/intrusion call. DO NOT CALL 911 to cancel your alarm, call your alarm monitoring company.

### **Can my alarm registration be suspended?**

Yes it can be suspended along with Police response. Several of the reasons for suspension are failure to keep a valid alarm registration, failure to pay false alarm fees or excessive false alarms within your registration period. Police response may be suspended after the **FIFTH** false burglar/intrusion alarm within your registration period. An alarm user will be provided a thirty (30) day period to be reinstated prior to the actual suspension.

### **How is my alarm company involved in this matter?**

Your alarm company plays a very important role in helping to reduce false alarms. They are there to assist you with any questions you may have about your alarm system's operation and its maintenance. To prevent having any false alarms, check with your alarm company for suggestions on how to avoid the most common alarm user errors or go to our link at [www.atbservices.com/suffolk](http://www.atbservices.com/suffolk).

The ordinance also requires your alarm company to attempt to notify you within 24 hours of an alarm dispatch request made to the police department. The notification process can be by telephone, (message left), fax, mail or other electronic means. Remember that your alarm contract is between you and your alarm company, not the City of Suffolk.

### **Why was ATB Services contracted to administer the alarm program?**

ATB Service is a national professional service company which provides a comprehensive service to exclusively administer alarm programs for other cities nationwide. Rarely is it cost effective for a community to create and maintain their own system of tracking and billing false alarm violations, as it

requires new computer software, hiring and training additional administrative staff.

ATB Services leverages their expertise, systems, people and processes to administer false alarm programs for many jurisdictions, thus spreading the infrastructure cost to make it affordable for all communities.

Suffolk must track more than 6,000 false alarm calls a year, coordinate and interact with 45 alarm installation and monitoring centers both in state and out of state. The City has an estimated 3,500 or more alarm users to register, track their alarm calls, billings, suspensions and reinstatements. The alarm administrator will also provide an on-line alarm users school, account on-line access for alarm users, alarm companies and a variety of alarm information and alarm status for City officials.

**What is the effective date for the ordinance?**

The City of Suffolk Council passed the ordinance on May 21, 2008. The requirements in the ordinance became effective on July 1, 2008.

**Where can I read or obtain a copy of the ordinance?**

The alarm ordinance is posted online at [www.atbservices.com/suffolk](http://www.atbservices.com/suffolk) or call toll free 1-866-950-8185.

**Where can I learn more about the ordinance and how to reduce false alarms?**

A free online alarm school is available at [www.atbservices.com/suffolk](http://www.atbservices.com/suffolk). Everyone who will use your alarm system is encouraged to take the free 15 to 20 minute online class.

**Who can I call if I have additional questions or comments?**

Call toll free 1-866-950-8185, Monday through Friday, 9 am – 7 pm.