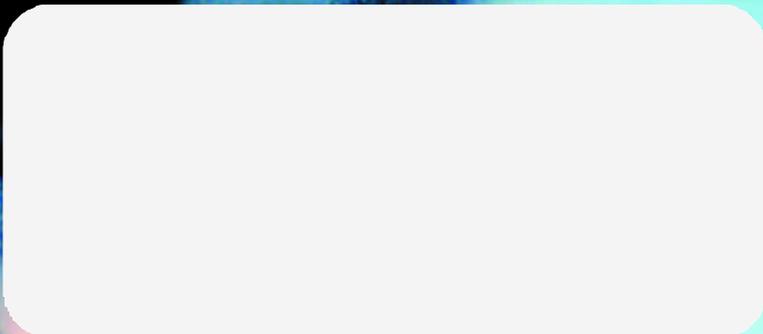# The PoliceChief

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False Alarms

Alarm Industry Steps Up to Reduce

False Alarm Calls

through Enhanced Call Verification

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

R E S O L U T I O N

Adopted at the 109th Annual Conference
Minneapolis, Minnesota
October 8, 2002

Measure to Enhance Police Resources
Submitted by the Private Sector Liaison Committee
PSLC025.a02

WHEREAS, homeland security has put new demands on law enforcement resources; and,

WHEREAS, results from studies initiated by the alarm industry indicate that multiple call verification (two or more calls prior to request for dispatch) significantly reduces false dispatches, thereby freeing up law enforcement resources that can be redirected to homeland security issues; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED; IACP urges all alarm companies to:

- **Immediately implement multiple call verification procedures to be used by the central station monitoring center prior to law enforcement dispatch on all alarm signals from customer alarms, and**

  - **Support local jurisdiction efforts to adopt procedures or ordinances mandating multiple call verification procedures.**

I t is no secret that responding to false alarm calls places an undue burden on police resources and affects agencies' responses to more serious calls. There are a number of effective strategies that have been developed jointly by the IACP's Private Sector Liaison Committee and the Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC) to help reduce false alarm calls. These strategies include the development of a model ordinance, registration guidelines, graduated fine structure, new equipment standards, suspension of response to chronic abusers, and an in-house or outsourced billing and tracking component.

In addition to these strategies, the alarm industry, in recognizing the strain false alarm calls place on law enforcement, has initiated its Enhanced Call Verification (also referred to as Multiple Call Verification) program. Under this program, when central monitoring stations make two or more calls prior to requesting police dispatch, significant reductions in false alarm calls can be realized.

In the past, most alarm companies made only one call, usually to the alarm premises, before calling the police to dispatch. Under Enhanced Call Verification, the central station operators call the customer premises and then, if necessary, a second customer-provided phone number, such as a cell phone, to attempt to verify an

alarm before law enforcement is called. Enhanced Call Verification is becoming an industry standard, and during the past year has shown a significant reduction in alarm calls to 911 dispatch centers. False alarm calls to police can be reduced by as much as 40 percent as companies implement the second- or multiple-call procedure. With the promising preliminary results of the new procedure, the IACP, at the request of its Private Sector Liaison Committee, adopted the Measure to Enhance Police Resources Resolution on October 8, 2002, during the 109th Annual IACP Conference in Minneapolis. Under the resolution, IACP urged alarm companies to immediately implement multiple-call verification procedures and supported local jurisdictions' efforts in adopting procedures and ordinances mandating these procedures.

Many alarm companies have implemented procedures with notable results:

• ADT began making sweeping changes nationwide in its central station operations. It began making second call verifications with its West Coast accounts last year and is implementing its program state-by-state. ADT has announced a completion date of mid-October for all their North American accounts.

• Brinks Home Security Systems, which has a customer base that is 95 percent residential, currently has more than 50 percent of its accounts designated as second call verification. The company anticipates that this percentage will increase substantially as existing customers opt for the second call procedure. Currently, all new accounts are set up for two-call verification. Brinks's ultimate goal is to reduce its requests for police dispatches through its continuing work with Enhanced Call Verification.

Other alarm companies with local and regional operations are showing significant results:

• Vector Security, with headquarters in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, implemented Enhanced Call Verification in 2003 and required its customers to go to second call verification. Since adopting the procedure a year and a half ago, dispatches have been reduced dramatically. Forty-nine percent of alarm signals that would have generated a dispatch under the company's old system, in which only the premises was called, no longer resulted in a dispatch.[1]

• LOUD Security Systems, based in the Atlanta area, has reduced dispatches by 27 percent during a three-month period this year, as compared to the same period in 2003. Company President John Loud attributes this reduction to LOUD's two-call verification policy, which it instituted a little more than a year ago. Most notable is that this decrease in dispatches was realized even though the company increased its monitored subscriber base by 32 percent in that same time period. In June 2003, under its previous policy of making only one call, the company had 229 dispatches from its 1,161 monitored accounts. A year later, in June 2004, under the two-call policy, LOUD's 1,623 accounts generated only 175 dispatches.

• During 2003, Alarm Detection Systems (ADS) of Aurora, Illinois, advised its 23,000 customers that effective January 1, 2004, the company would not dispatch police in response to an alarm signal until it had called the premises and a second number. ADS's new system resulted in a reduction of nearly 25 percent in calls to 911 centers during the first seven months of 2004 as compared to the same period in 2003. According to company President and Chief Executive Officer Bob Bonifas, after seeing the immediate reductions in dispatch calls, ADS wanted to further improve its customer contact lists and improve the program's effectiveness. As a result, ADS recently mailed letters to its subscribers asking them to list more than one phone number to call if their alarm system trips.

• The Boulder, Colorado, Police Department is one of the first agencies to include Enhanced Call Verification as a department policy and has noted significant reductions in alarm calls for service. Boulder Police Chief Mark Beckner said his department realized significant results within the first 30 days after the policy became effective on June 1 of this year. "We immediately saw a 35 percent decrease in alarm calls to our communications center, and with our new policy, we expect a 40 to 50 percent reduction during the first year," he said.

The alarm industry has been working with the Boulder Police Department, and prior to the police department's enacting its current policy some alarm companies voluntarily began making second call verifications. Since November 2003, a 25 percent reduction in calls to police has been achieved. As a result of the new police department policy, which requires all alarm companies to make a second call, the alarm industry anticipates a 50 percent reduction over the next 12 months in Boulder.

• Lee County, Florida, is believed to be the first jurisdiction in the country to include Enhanced Call Verification in its alarm ordinance. The ordinance was adopted in March 2003, and enforcement began January 1, 2004. Since the first of the year, the Lee County Sheriff's Office has seen a steady decrease in alarm calls and currently has seen calls drop on average from 96 to 45 per day. Major Dan Johnson, the executive lead in Lee County Sheriff's Office's effort to reduce alarm calls, said, "With our noted success in reducing in the number of alarm calls coming into our communications center for the first seven months of 2004, we clearly expect to reach our targeted goal of 70 percent during 2005." He added, "The success of Lee County's efforts is the direct result of its initial public education program, public acceptance, and the cooperation and partnership with the alarm industry in finding a solution for a community-wide problem."

Clearly, Enhanced Call Verification is playing a significant role in reducing false alarm calls to police. With the continuing demands and priorities that are being placed on law enforcement, and particularly with recent demands requiring special attention to homeland security issues, the second call procedure is allowing law enforcement to redirect resources to more pressing matters.

It is widely accepted that a 50 percent reduction in requests for police dispatch can be realized when the IACP resolution is acted upon by the alarm industry in implementing Enhanced Call Verification and when local jurisdictions and agencies adopt elements of the resolution into local ordinances and policies. The Private Sector Liaison Committee and the Security Industry Alarm Coalition will continue to monitor the results and successes of the program. According to SIAC Executive Director Stan Martin, Enhanced Call Verification is fast becoming an industry standard. Martin also reminds departments that studies have shown that alarm ordinances must be enforced to achieve the maximum benefit of reduced calls for service.

[1] "Success Stories in Reducing False Alarms," *SDM Magazine* (July 2004).

The primary mission of the Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC) is to work with local and state agencies and the alarm industry to assist in finding viable solutions to the alarm management issues that impact the safety and security of more than 30 million alarm system users in homes and businesses throughout North America. Recognizing that alarm dispatches are less of a problem in cities and counties with effective alarm ordinances and sustained reduction programs, SIAC focuses its work on that small percentage of chronic abusers who account for the greatest abuse of public resources.

SIAC works closely with the leadership and actively participates within the committee structures of national law enforcement associations. These include:

- The International Association of Chiefs of Police, working through the PSLC: Private Sector Liaison Committee; and the SACOP: State Association of Chiefs of Police

- The National Sheriffs Association

- FBI-LEEDA - Law Enforcement Executive Development Association

SIAC works collectively to:

- Provides no-cost alarm management seminars to law enforcement and assists agencies with developing effective alarm management programs

- Works to ensure strong focus and education is maintained by the security industry in targeting the reductions of alarm dispatches

- Engage with local and state agencies and legislative bodies to propose and enact practical and effective ordinances that promote community safety

Successful Models SIAC Promotes:

- Montgomery County, Maryland
  Best practice ordinance demonstrates that alarm dispatch reductions can be sustained over a long period of time when well enforced.

- Phoenix, Arizona
  Cost recovery program is first to achieve significant false alarm reductions. Police respond to 100% of alarms and utilize public education programs.

- Charlotte Mecklenburg, North Carolina
  First to effectively and safety implement outsourcing of billing and tracking administration. Eight years sustained dispatch reductions with 92% of 118,000 permitted sites never having a billable fine.

- Alachua County and Gainesville, Florida
  First adoption of the complete Model Ordinance and first to use the information collected during the Model States Program.

- Lee County, Florida
  Mandates ECV - Enhanced Call Verification - and use of equipment tested to SIA CP-01 (Control Panel) Standard. Nearly 50% reduction in less than a year.

SIAC, a non-profit organization, is the one voice for the alarm industry for Alarm Management Issues representing the *Security Industry Association* (SIA*), National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association* (NBFAA*), Canadian Security Association* (CANASA), and *Central Station Alarm Association* (CSAA). SIAC's staff is regionally based and combines the experience of senior law enforcement personnel with seasoned alarm industry veterans. This unique team of experts is available to any community and/or law enforcement agency upon request at no cost.

To learn more about SIAC, view documents, obtain research data and/or request a copy of a SIAC resource CD, please visit us at www.siacinc.org , or contact Stan Martin, Executive Director, at stan@siacinc.org <mailto:stan@siacinc.org>, or (972) 377-9410.