



NBFAA Position Paper on Public Safety Response to Alarm Notifications

What is the NBFAA?

Founded in 1948, the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA) represents more than 3,200 companies in each of the fifty states and four U.S. territories, engaged in the manufacture, sale, installation, service and/or monitoring of electronic systems.

Background

As the American public continues to demand more security for themselves, their businesses and their homes by having a professionally installed and monitored electronic security system, the incidence of false alarm dispatches has created an undue burden on local public safety departments. Faced with smaller budgets and requests from their constituencies to do more with their already limited resources, some local agencies and governments have responded to this by proposing the restriction or elimination of public safety first response to the activation of an alarm system.

Such proposals usually take one of two forms. In the first scenario, referred to as “**no-response**,” alarm companies are prohibited from notifying local public authorities of alarm activations, and the response to the activation must be provided by a private company, if at all. In the second approach, often called “**verified response**”, local authorities may only be notified of an alarm activation after the alarm site has been physically investigated by a private response guard to ensure that an actual emergency is taking place. The result of either of these approaches is the same: the first response to alarm activations is a private guard rather than public authorities.

Position

As a public service and expression of its concern about this subject, the Board of Directors of the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA) has adopted the following:

- NBFAA supports the right of citizens to request and receive public safety (police and/or fire) first response to burglar and fire alarms.
- NBFAA acknowledges that alarm companies do not originate alarm calls. They only relay a request for service from citizens of the community.
- NBFAA supports the right of professional alarm dealers to act as an authorized agent of a citizen to request and receive public safety (police and/or fire) first response to burglar and fire alarms to a citizens alarm.
- NBFAA is committed to the reduction of false alarms through cooperative efforts between municipalities, emergency response services, private sector alarm monitoring services and alarm users.

Value of Alarms:

- **Alarm systems are the citizens first line of defense.** Alarm systems with timely public safety response provide a proven deterrent to burglary, deter the violent crimes that often accompany burglary, provide an early warning of the dangers inherent in fire and burglary and are an efficient and effective means to summon the appropriate public authorities.
- **Alarm Systems provide a valuable supplement to public police and fire activities** and are a valuable component of overall fire and crime prevention efforts. *(In a national survey of police chiefs, 90 percent acknowledged that alarms both deter burglary attempts and increase the probability of a burglar being apprehended. The effectiveness of fire alarms is demonstrated by building code requirements for monitored fire alarms in many occupancies.)*
- **False alarm signals from any alarm system are undesirable.** They waste resources, they may cause complacency in the investigation of all alarm reports and they reduce faith in alarm systems.
- **Citizens support public safety (police and fire) first response to alarms.** *(Surveys show that over 82% of citizens support police response to alarms.)*

Problems with Public Safety No-Response:

- Privatization of response may seem attractive to some departments. However, along with privatization comes a multitude of problems. With improperly trained individuals responding to potentially dangerous situations, more problems will arise. Law enforcement officers and fire fighters are properly trained for these situations, but without a mandate or requirement, economics usually prevent the provision of adequate training for the private response employee.
- Public safety no-response hinders the right of citizens to effectively use their alarms. *(The first line of defense that an alarm system gives is broken down by the lack of first response from a law enforcement or fire official that is trained to react to a range of dangerous situations. Citizens' are left with two options - either using a private response company that is revenue driven (not focused on public safety) or not contracting for private response, because the cost of response is more than double the amount they pay monthly for monitoring.)*
- Elimination of public safety first response on calls originating from monitoring companies would discourage the use of monitoring services, eliminate the benefits of this screening process and could result in a significant increase in the requests for response from alarm systems that would simply sound a local bell or siren. *(Professional alarm monitoring services screen and typically eliminate a significant percentage of alarm signals before they request a dispatch of the authorities.)*
- Eliminating public safety first response to alarm activations may well violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. *(These proposals do not treat similarly situated people alike, and hence violate the equal protection clause. For example, a jurisdiction that responds to alarms gives its citizens equal protection. A jurisdiction that reverts to private response only allows those citizens that can afford private response to have that protection.)*

Alternatives to Public Safety No-Response:

- The NBFSA does recognize the urgency of the false alarm problem and has established programs to implement proven ways to reduce false alarms via summits with alarm industry and public safety officials across North America that teach false dispatch reduction techniques.
- A well-crafted alarm ordinance such as one based on the FARA*/NBFSA Model Burglar Alarm Ordinance can significantly reduce false dispatches. Such an ordinance can help financially support the cost of alarm response, penalize alarm users that abuse police and fire response and encourage the responsible use of alarm systems to protect lives and property. *(*FARA-The False Alarm Reduction Association is an organization of government employed alarm managers throughout the United States).*
- Eliminating response to alarm abusers until corrective action is taken is a solution to both reduce the number of dispatches and curb the false alarm problem *(by adding a provision to your ordinance that allows for restricted response after a certain number of false alarms you can educate the chronic abusers while avoiding punishment of the citizens that are responsible users of their alarm systems).*
- Non-sworn officers can be employed and trained by the department to respond to alarms. Non-Sworn Alarm Responder Guidelines adopted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) establish the extensive training and other requirements that should be met by these individuals.

NBFSA's position on this subject is stated in this document as a whole and no portion of it is to be taken or quoted out of context. For further information on this subject and about the electronic systems industry in general, please contact the NBFSA at 8300 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, MD 20910, call us at 301-585-1855, e-mail at fact@alarm.org, or visit www.alarm.org.