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Unwanted Fire Signals Policy

Policy No 52

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Delivery Area	Unwanted Fire Signals Policy
Policy Process	Detail
Authored by:	J Flounders: Head of Protection
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Unison Consultation:	N/A
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Implementing Officer:	Joe Flounders: Head of Protection

1 Policy

- 1.1 This policy is designed to reduce the impact of 'False Alarm' calls generated from automatic fire detection systems. A False Alarm is defined as a signal resulting from a cause or causes other than a fire.
- 1.2 Cleveland Fire Authority (CFA) categorise calls to premises, where on attendance, there is found to be no fire as 'False Alarms'. These calls include calls from individuals which may be genuine but turned out to be incorrect (these are recorded as a false alarm - good Intent) or malicious in nature (recorded as false alarm - malicious). There is a third category of false alarm calls, those that result from automatic fire alarm systems passed to the Brigade from both non-domestic and domestic premises (recorded as Unwanted Fire signals(UwFS)).
- 1.3 CFA recognises the value of fire detection in protecting people from fire and reducing the number of fire deaths and injuries. The objective of this Policy through challenging calls received taking a staged response to poor performance and where necessary recovering costs is to encourage proper use and management of these systems. To ensure that those responsible have a suitable system with appropriate management processes in place and reduce the number of false alarms caused by these systems.
- 1.4 The inclusion of suitable automatic fire detection in certain circumstances within the Building Regulations and the requirements imposed on certain types of premises under fire safety legislation means that the potential for false alarms will continue to increase year on year. Therefore, there must be a robust procedure in place to ensure that premises giving rise to persistent UwFS are identified and proportional action taken if the Brigade is to continue to reduce the number of UwFS attended each year.
- 1.5 The policy will outline the how we will respond to calls from alarm receiving centres and premises as a result of an automatic detection and alarm system actuating and provide the rationale for implementing a cost recovery process and detail the criteria as to which premises are identified for cost recovery and how this can be applied.

2 Policy Objectives

2.1 This policy will be delivered against our strategic outcome relating to Business Safety as detailed in the Community Safety Strategy 2018-2022 through the following objectives;

- Reduce the number of false alarm activations generated by fire detection and alarm systems.
- Deliver significant reductions in appliance movements therefore reducing the disruption to operational crews undertaking other core tasks such as training and community safety activities.
- Reduce the risk to the public and operational staff through unnecessary movement of emergency responses.

2.2 The purpose of applying a cost recovery process in relation to attending persistent false alarms at a premises is to stimulate an improvement in the organisations management of their automatic fire alarm system. This is expected to have the following impact:

- An improvement in organisations alarm management practices
- An increase in the general standard of fire safety at premises
- An improvement in the local response to potential emergency situations
- A reduction in the unnecessary burden on Cleveland Fire Brigade's resources
- An increase in the availability of appliances and staff for real emergencies, training, prevention and protection activities

3 Scope

3.1 This Policy applies to all elements of Cleveland Fire Brigade whether in direct delivery of services or in support of that service delivery.

4 Policy Category

4.1 The policy is categorised as 'Authority' within the key document framework

5 Organising

5.1 Cleveland Fire Authority (CFA) is responsible for :

- Delivering its statutory requirements,
- Setting the Authority's strategic direction with regard to protection services that includes UwFS.

5.2 The Brigade's Executive Leadership Team is responsible for:

- Agreeing the structure, configuration and the resourcing of protection services to deliver the policy and strategy,
- Setting policies and strategies in relation to the reduction of UwFS,
- Ensuring all relevant legislation is adhered to.

5.3 The Assistant Chief fire Officer, Director of Community Protection is responsible for:

- Advising ELT on strategic protection matters relating to UwFS,
- Overseeing, monitoring and scrutinising UwFS arrangements.

5.4 The Area Manager overseeing Community Protection is responsible for:

- Advising the Director of Community Protection on matters pertaining to UwFS,
- Developing and implementing arrangements to ensure this policy, the UwFS Strategy and associated procedures are robust,
- Ensuring that the organisation operates within any legal requirements such as The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

5.5 The Head of Fire Engineering is responsible for:

- Implementing the Authority's UwFS strategy and associated arrangements,
- Ensuring that the strategy and associated procedures meet statutory requirements,
- Providing advice and guidance to managers and staff on the application of this policy and associated procedures,
- Developed effective partnership and communication relationships with public, private and voluntary agencies to ensure awareness of this policy,
- Measuring any impact on the Brigade following implementation of the policy.

5.6 District Managers, Warranted Officers and Station Based Advisors are responsible for:

- Fairly and consistently applying this policy and associated procedure.

5.7 Individuals are responsible for:

- Ensuring that they comply with requirements of this policy and associated procedure.

5.8 Trade Unions are responsible for:

- Engaging with management during the application of this policy and procedure.

6 Planning and Implementing

6.1 This policy is underpinned and implemented through Community Safety Strategy; both documents should be read in conjunction with one and other.

6.2 All new staff will be made aware of this Policy and its associated procedure as part of their induction.

6.3 Existing staff will be informed of this policy and associated procedure, this will be made available on the Brigade's intranet; no formal training is anticipated.

6.4 The UwFS Policy and its associated procedures will be reviewed and implemented together to ensure that developments in the Brigade's Protection arrangements are comprehensively communicated to staff, managers and Elected Members.

7 Resource Implications

7.1 It is anticipated that there will be a positive impact on the finances of the organisation through a reduction in attendances and appliance movements. Where organisations reach the poor performance thresholds for false alarms, we will endeavour to recover those costs associated with attendances to UwFS, which will benefit the Brigade's financial strategy.

8 Response to Calls

8.1 The Authority will provide the following response to AFA's:-

Cleveland Fire Brigade will not attend AFA's to low and medium risk premises between the hours of 07:00 and 18:00 Monday to Saturday and 10:00 and 16:00 Sunday, unless a backup call is received from the premises via the 999 system, confirming there is a fire, or that physical signs of fire exist. A further trial is currently being undertaken to establish if introducing this policy over a 24hr period will produce further reductions, this result will be reported on in 2021.

Risk Categorisation:

- Low or Medium Risk premises - This applies to the following premises
 - Industrial premises
 - Business premises
 - Commercial premises
 - Schools
 - Residential Care Premises (during period 0900-1800hrs)
 - Leisure complexes
 - Hotels
 - Halls of Residence
 - Public Buildings
- Any premises determined as High or Special risk will receive one Fire Appliance for investigation purposes.
- Cleveland Fire Brigade will not attend Automatic Fire Alarms from Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) unless they are backed up with a 999 call from premises to either the ARC or to Fire Control. If no person is present to investigate the cause of the actuation then a single appliance will be mobilised for investigation purposes.
- Sheltered housing (including bungalows and flats) and private dwellings are exempt from the conditions outlined above.

8.2 On occasions where more than one device has actuated i.e. a 'Double Knock' then this will be treated as a confirmed fire and the full PDA dispatched.

8.3 Examples of High risk properties may include COMAH sites within the Brigade's 'Concept of Operations', factories with dangerous processes, premises with a 'sleeping' risk deemed to be high which may include hospitals, care homes, hotels, halls of residence or HMO (houses in multiple occupation).

8.4 Special risk properties will include those buildings that have a heritage factor for example Ormesby Hall, Preston Park Hall, and Wynyard Hall etc. Special risk also includes those premises that contain equipment or data that is of significant importance to the National Infrastructure.

8.5 CFA will provide advice to the business community (in-line with resources available) to ensure that all non-domestic premises are aware of their responsibilities under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

8.6 Where a premises can demonstrate that there are exceptional circumstances for that premises to receive a full AFA PDA then an exception can be granted.

9 Cost Recovery

- 9.1 The legal basis for charging comes from the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRSA) as amended by the Localism Act 2011.
- 9.2 The Authority has no legal power to make a profit from any charges. Section 18A (5) of the FRSA says *“In setting the amount of the charge a FRA must secure that, taking one financial year with another, the authority’s income from charges does not exceed the cost to the authority of taking the action for which the charges are imposed.”*
- 9.3 The Localism Act has also amended the FRSA by introducing a new power, which allows the Authority to charge for attendance at unwanted fire signals due to an automatic fire alarm (AFA).
- 9.4 Charging by Authorities is detailed within Section 18 of the FRSA extracts from the Act pertaining to cost recovery include;

18A Charging by authorities

- (1) A fire and rescue authority may charge a person for any action taken by the authority—
- (a) in the United Kingdom or at sea or under the sea, and
 - (b) otherwise than for a commercial purpose, but this is subject to the provisions of this section and section 18B.

18B Limits on charging under section 18A(1)

- (3) Section 18A(1) authorises charging for action taken in response to a report of a fire or explosion only if section 18C applies to the report.

18C Cases where a charge may be made for responding to report of fire etc

- (1) This section applies for the purposes of section 18B(3).
- (2) This section applies to a report of fire, or explosion, at sea or under the sea.
- (3) This section applies to a report of fire if—
- (a) the report is of fire at premises that are not domestic premises,
 - (b) the report is false
 - (c) the report is made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment having malfunctioned or been misinstalled, and
 - (d) there is a persistent problem with false reports of fire at the premises that are made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment under common control having malfunctioned or been misinstalled.
- 9.5 Details relating to what constitutes poor performance and the recovery of cost rate can be found within the UwFS Procedure

10 People Impact Assessment

- 10.1 In accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duties, Equality Act and other relevant legislation, the potential impact of this policy and associated procedure have been taken into consideration.

11 Monitoring

- 11.1 The Risk and Performance Team will ensure the central monitoring of this policy and associated procedure and ensure that it is added to the Brigade's Key Document Framework, this will be reviewed in line with timelines specified.

12 Audit

- 12.1 This Policy will be audited in accordance with the procedure detailed within the Brigade's policy framework.

13 Review

- 13.1 The Area Manager responsible for Community Protection will undertake a review of this policy in 2022 to ensure it is taking account of any new or emerging political, economic, social, technological, legislative, environmental, competitive, citizen or reputational factors.