

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is a false alarm?

A false alarm is defined as an alarm activation that results in a dispatch request to the police department, that is not cancelled prior to the officer arriving at the scene, and for which there is no evidence of criminal activity to justify a police response.

### 2. Why does the County need a false alarm ordinance?

The Howard County Police Department is working to reduce false alarms in the County because they take police officers away from other crime prevention efforts and delays response time to true emergencies. Alarm legislation was adopted in an effort to reduce the waste of resources that occurs when a false alarm sounds. An excessively high false alarm rate reduces overall effectiveness and places a greater burden on public safety.

### 3. What is the effective date of the false alarm ordinance?

The alarm ordinance went into effect on April 1, 2003

### 4. Why do I have to fill out a registration form?

The false alarm ordinance requires all residential and non-residential alarm users to register their security alarm systems with the Howard County Department of Police.

### 5. Do I have to register my alarm system on line?

We strongly recommend registering your alarm online, however if you are unable to do so, you can contact the local branch of your alarm company to obtain a paper copy of the registration form. If they are unable to provide you a copy contact our office at [falsealarmreduction@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:falsealarmreduction@howardcountymd.gov) and we will mail you a registration form.

By registering your alarm system online, you also create an account that you can use to easily update information and renew your registration as needed.

### 6. If I install my own alarm system do I have to have it registered?

If your alarm system is self-installed and you are having it monitored by an alarm company/monitoring center you must register the system.

### 7. How much is the registration fee?

There is a one-time, non-refundable \$25.00 registration fee.

### 8. When does my registration expire?

An alarm user (residential and non-residential) registration is effective for a period of **2 years**. There is no fee for the renewal of a registration. Alarm registration renewal is done through your existing account. Do not create a new account for renewal purposes.

An alarm/monitoring company business registration is also effective for a period of 2 years. There is no fee for the renewal of a registration.

### **9. If I change alarm companies do I need to register again?**

If you still live at the same address or are at the same business address (same suite, if applicable) you do **not** need to register again. If you have set up on-line access to your alarm registration, you can make the updates, otherwise contact our office at [falsealarmreduction@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:falsealarmreduction@howardcountymd.gov) and we will update your alarm registration.

### **10. Can my alarm registration be transferred to another person, business or alarm site?**

An alarm system registration is not transferable. An alarm user must inform the alarm administrator within 10 business days of a change that alters any information listed on the registration application.

### **11. What happens if I don't register?**

A person who maintains or operates an unregistered alarm system is subject to a civil penalty of \$200.00 for each police response to the alarm site in addition to the penalties imposed for a false alarm response. The penalty may be waived if the alarm user registers the system within 10 days after the violation.

### **12. What is the fine schedule and how does it work?**

False alarms one and two are warnings, no fine is imposed. False alarm three is \$50.00 and each subsequent false alarm escalates by \$50.00 up to false alarm 10. For example, false alarm 10 is \$400.00. False alarms 11 through 14 escalate by \$100.00 each and false alarm 15 escalates by \$200.00. The maximum fine is \$1,000.00 (15 Plus)

### **13. When does a false alarm drop off my record?**

Each false alarm is on a 365 day rolling calendar (from the date of the false alarm).

### **14. When should I contact my alarm company?**

- you have an unexplained alarm activation,
- you get an indoor pet,
- you are about to remodel,
- your phone number(s) change,
- your last name (or business name) has changed,
- you want to change your emergency contacts,
- you are going to be out of town for an extended period of time or,
- you are moving

### **15. I had a false alarm because we lost power. Why is that a false alarm?**

If you have a false alarm because of a power failure or after a storm your batteries may not be operating properly. A false alarm may be generated when your alarm system powers up after a power failure. Even a short power failure of a second or less may be long enough to cause a false activation of your alarm.

**16. How can I reduce the chance that the battery will cause a false alarm?**

Your backup battery has a useful life of about 3 to 5 years, but that life can be shortened if you have had several power outages. Your battery backup should be checked annually (or after any power failure or storm related false activation of your alarm) by an alarm technician and replaced when needed.

**17. What do I do if I accidentally set off the alarm system?**

Do not panic! Enter your disarm code carefully to reset your system. Wait for your alarm/monitoring company to call, give your password or ID number. Do not call 911 to cancel a false alarm. You must call your monitoring station (if they do not call you). **Only the alarm company/monitoring station can cancel the false alarm with the Department of Police.**

**18. I just got a letter for False Alarm 3 and I don't understand the waiver, what do I do?**

You are allowed to request a waiver of the \$50 fine for false Alarm 3 after you complete the "Alarm School" course that is on this Web site. Once you have selected the applicable response at the end of the test the False Alarm Reduction Unit will be automatically notified and the \$50.00 fine will be adjudicated.

**19. I would like to appeal my false alarm – what do I need to do?**

Review the False Alarm Appeal Guidelines. Print out the appeal hearing request form. It must be received within 30 days of the day the alarm was processed (the *date of the letter* not the date that the alarm occurred) and the request **must be** accompanied by a \$20 filing fee.

**20. Who can I contact if I have additional questions or comments?**

The preferred method of communication is via email. You can contact us as [falsealarmreduction@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:falsealarmreduction@howardcountymd.gov). Alternatively, if you cannot send an email, call the False Alarm Reduction Unit at (410) 313-6199, Monday through Friday 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM.