



GENERAL ORDER OPS-39 FALSE ALARM ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES

EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

This General Order contains the following numbered sections:

- I. POLICY
- II. DEFINITIONS
- III. PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES
- IV. PROCEDURES
- V. CANCELLATION

I. POLICY

It is the policy of the Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) to encourage citizens and businesses to properly use and maintain alarm systems to deter crime. It shall be the policy of the Department to fully enforce Title 17 Subtitle 7 of the Howard County Code, regarding false alarms.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. ALARM ADMINISTRATOR

The Traffic Management Division Commander shall serve as the Alarm Administrator.

B. FALSE ALARM COORDINATOR

The individual within the False Alarm Unit who shall perform duties as assigned by the Alarm Administrator.

C. ALARM SYSTEM

A mechanical or electrical device which is designed to be activated manually or automatically upon the detection of an unauthorized entry, intrusion, or other emergency in or on any building, structure, facility or premises. This does not include auto alarms, unless permanently located at a site, or an alarm designed to alert only the inhabitants of a premise, which does not have a sounding device that can be heard on the exterior of the alarm site.

D. CANCELLATION

An alarm call in which the Communications Division is notified by the alarm company or a police supervisor decides to discontinue police response prior to the officer arriving on the scene. Alarms that are cancelled prior to the officer's arrival, whether by the alarm company or a police supervisor, shall be cleared as "NR - Cancelled" and will result in the alarm user not being penalized for repeat false alarms.¹

E. DISPATCH REQUEST

A notification to a law enforcement agency that an alarm system has been activated at an alarm site, and is summoning a law enforcement response to the site.

¹ CALEA 81.2.13

F. FALSE ALARM

Activation of any alarm system intentionally or by inadvertence, negligence or unintentional act that results in a dispatch request that is not cancelled prior to the arrival of police personnel at the site. It is a false alarm if there is no evidence of criminal activity to justify response or it was intentionally activated to summon the police for a non-emergency situation or was activated without visible evidence of severe conditions directly affecting the alarm site (e.g., tree striking building, object thrown through window, etc).

III. PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The Automated Enforcement Section

The Section is assigned to the Traffic Management Division, Special Operations Bureau, Investigations & Special Operations Command (ISOC). The Section includes:

1. The supervisor of the Automated Enforcement Section shall report directly to the False Alarm Administrator and shall supervise the False Alarm Coordinator.
2. The False Alarm Administrator
 - a. Administer, control, and review alarm applications, register alarm companies and users with the police department, monitor false alarm response, and administer fines and appeals for violations of Title 17, Subtitle 7 of the Howard County Code;
 - b. Designate the manner, form, and telephone numbers for the communication of alarm dispatch requests;
 - c. Develop a procedure to accept verified cancellations of alarm dispatch requests;
 - d. Issue a monthly report of false alarm activity, fines, and registrations by the 5th of every month. The alarm administrator shall report annually (or as requested) to the Chief of Police on the implementation and status of the programs under Title 17, Subtitle 17 of the Howard County Code. The Chief of Police shall file an annual report with the County Executive and the County Council on the status of the False Alarm Program;
 - e. Delegate specific authority and responsibilities as deemed appropriate to the False Alarm Coordinator, Administrative Sergeant, or other Automated Enforcement Division personnel as required;
 - f. Develop a False Alarm Education Reduction Program; and
 - g. Conduct Appeals hearings.
3. The False Alarm Coordinator shall be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the False Alarm Reduction Program and other duties as assigned by the False Alarm Administrator.

B. Communications Division

To assist the False Alarm Reduction Unit, the Communications Division shall record the following information into CAD for each alarm signal received:

1. The date and time of receipt of the dispatch request;
2. Area and beat of premises;

3. The location of the alarm site;
 4. The alarm registration number for the alarm site;
 5. Dispatch and arrival times of police personnel;
 6. Identification number of the officer responding;
 7. Identification of the responsible alarm monitor; and
 8. Disposition of the response. Dispatchers will ensure that officers advise the disposition of all alarm calls and will enter the proper code into the computer.
- C. Responding officers shall²:
1. Check the premises, to the extent possible;
 2. Properly identify any individual located on the premises and/or anyone who has responded to the scene as a representative of the property owner; and
 3. Officers shall clear alarms using the codes located in Appendix A.

Officers responding to a location where there is evidence of criminal activity, suspected criminal activity, an open door, or window causing the alarm **shall reclassify the alarm** to the proper classification and, if necessary, initiate an incident report as required under General Order ADM-11, Departmental Reporting System. (e.g.: While checking the premises, an officer discovers an open door, the call will be reclassified with a report to follow, but a tree striking the building causing the alarm shall be cleared as "NR - property damage".) This will prevent a citation being mailed to the premises. **Officers shall not draw a new incident number.**

- D. Supervisors shall:

Make a determination if a police response is necessary for repeat alarms or other special circumstances.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. If an alarm system emits a false alarm signal within any rolling 12-month period, the alarm user is subject to a civil penalty based upon an escalating scale set in Title 17 Subtitle 7 Section 713 of the Howard County Code. A warning letter shall be sent for the first two false alarms in any 12-month period and subsequent alarms will be fined according to the fine schedule outlined in Title 17 Subtitle 7 Section 713 of the Howard County Code.
- B. An alarm system that is activated a second time within a 24-hour period shall be deemed one (1) false alarm.
- C. Administrative fines and all necessary follow-up actions shall be the responsibility of the False Alarm Reduction Section.
- D. The Howard County Police Department **will not** institute a "no response" policy for alarm users that have not paid fines or are unregistered. Officers will continue to respond to these locations and provide professional services regardless of the user's status with the False Alarm Reduction Section. This does not prohibit supervisors from canceling alarm responses if a police response is not necessary³.

² CALEA 81.2.13

³ CALEA 81.2.13

V. CANCELLATION

This General Order cancels and replaces General Order OPS-39, False Alarm Enforcement Procedures, dated April 1, 2004.

Authority:



William J. McMahon
Chief of Police

Appendix A

Clearance Codes of False Alarms

Officers shall advise Communications of one of the following dispositions when clearing an alarm:

No Report (NR) - Cause Unknown

Unable to determine reason why an alarm was activated (e.g.: faulty, negligent).

No Report (NR) - False Activation

Alarms deliberately activated for the purpose of summoning the police for a non-emergency purpose.

No Report (NR) - Accidental

For false alarms at which a representative of the property is on the scene to report that the alarm was activated accidentally, or as the result of the movement of pets, or other objects, inside the premises.

No Report (NR) - Cancelled

For alarm responses that are cancelled, by the alarm company or a police supervisor, prior to an officer arriving at the scene.

No Report (NR) - Property Damage

Alarm was activated by visible damage to the premises such as a tree during a storm, wildlife, accidental window breakage, etc.

No Report (NR) - Unable to Locate

No Report (NR) - No Police Action

No police action can be taken due to an unusual situation (e.g.: dispatch error, the location is not equipped with an alarm, etc.).

No Report (NR) - Other Police Agency Handling

Report - Report to Follow (RTF)

Report may be written if officer or officer's supervisor determines that a need exists.