

SOUTH YORKSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

Meeting	FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
Meeting Date	24 JUNE 2019
Report of	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Report Sponsor(s)	T/ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER / DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY
Subject	PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE AUTOMATIC ATTENDANCE TO COMMERCIAL AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARM ACTUATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide rationale and evidence to support the restriction of attendances to **commercial** Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) mobilisations. A commercial premises is considered to be any retail, office, industrial or further education premises where there are no potential sleeping risks present.

This proposal outlines the review undertaken by South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (SYFR's) attendance at AFAs and seeks to improve the efficiency of the service.

Research conducted suggests that SYFR are currently one of the few remaining Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) that attend alarm activations at these premises types, especially during daytime hours; and to restrict these attendances would provide less, often unnecessary, interruptions to crew training and community safety activities. This restriction would also assist SYFR with managing operational road risks while travelling to investigate these activations in line with the Managing Occupational Road Risk Operational Guidance Note.

There is no proposed change to the current Pre-determined Attendance (PDA) to residential or sleeping risk premises, or high risk sites (Control of Major Accident Hazards [COMAH]) within the SYFR boundaries.

Automatic fire alarms are defined as those originating from AFA monitoring companies. Calls made by a person direct from premises reporting a fire alarm actuating will always be questioned by Control to ascertain more information before dispatching any resources. A confirmed fire will always attract a full PDA response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of the report and endorse Option 1.

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Main Report

BACKGROUND

1. Historically, SYFR has always attended any AFA actuation (either domestic or commercial) to investigate. Due to ongoing financial reductions and increasing demand on operational resource a review of response has been considered to improve service efficiency. Mobilisations to public safety, residential or sleeping risk properties will still continue with no change to response. However, instead of committing fire appliances to incidents and then awaiting key holders to gain access to investigate a building, organisations should be encouraged to provide resources to investigate AFA signals in their own properties with either their own staff as key holders, or through private security contractor agreements.
2. The responsibility for the building and meeting insurance terms and obligations lie with the organisation or the building management company themselves, not SYFR, and this is an area in which efficiency savings can be found.
3. A paper was submitted to the Corporate Management Board (CMB) on 19 April 2018 entitled Charging for Unwanted Fire Signals. The paper was approved, but has not yet been implemented. The proposals recommended in this report, would assist with achieving the aims of the previously approved paper.

MAIN REPORT

4. When correctly installed and managed, Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems provide an effective way of alerting people to a fire in non-domestic premises. However, false alarms from these systems, particularly repeat false alarms from the same premises, often results in costly disruption and inconvenience to the businesses themselves, as well as inconvenience and raised levels of risk to SYFR staff and members of the public in responding to these.
5. Attending AFA's as an emergency response puts fire crews and other road users at risk. False alarms from Unwanted Fire Signals (UWFS) also take appliances away from real emergencies, and at a cost to the community of South Yorkshire.
6. Alongside the financial implications, additional factors for consideration include:
 - The reduced availability of operational crews to attend genuine emergencies, particularly those that the Service is legally obliged to attend;
 - Increase in attendance times due to nearest appliance(s) being committed at a UWFS.
 - Unnecessary disruption to training and other work undertaken by Service personnel.
 - Impact on primary employers of the Service's on-call firefighters releasing staff members to attend UWFS incidents.
 - Increased risk to public and operational crews due to mobilising appliances to UWFS.
7. In the years 2016 to 2018, SYFR received **3,457** alarm calls to respond to commercial premises, predominantly from Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC) monitored Automatic Fire Alarm systems (2,527, or approx. 73%), of which **97.2% (3360)** of these were found to be false alarms or Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals.
8. Of the calls that were then changed to an IRS (Incident Recording System) Final Incident Type of Fire, very few were found to be of a nature of anything other than a result of the industrial processes carried out by the organisation, or careless food preparation, for example, burnt toast.

9. A total of **1027** hours was spent in attendance by SYFR appliances at incidents investigating AFAs over the period examined (2016-18), which equates as an average of **17-18** minutes spent investigating each one.
10. From 2019/20 onwards a proposal to discontinue the number of AFAs we respond to by no longer attending commercial premises either **a)** any time of the day or night, or **b)** during the hours of 08:00 to 19:00, when staff are usually on site at premises defined as being commercial in nature.
11. It is that, when SYFR receives an AFA call from a commercial premises, or any other premises categorised as 'in scope' (offices, shops, industrial, commercial, public buildings such as libraries or museums, places of worship, ~~colleges and universities without sleeping accommodation~~), the Service will not make an automatic emergency attendance unless there is a confirmed fire or a perceived presence of fire reported from the premises, such as a smell of smoke or burning. The go live date will be agreed during the consultation period.
12. In the event of an ARC receiving an unconfirmed AFA call or signal of this nature, then it would be expected that the ARC contact a nominated key holder from details provided by the premises (or an appropriate nominated security company) to investigate the premises involved, who can then confirm if an emergency service response is found to be required and dial 999 directly if this is the case.
13. The types of premises that will not be affected by these amendments are:
 - Domestic premises fire / smoke alarms.
 - Any other sleeping risk - including Hospitals, Homes for the elderly, Care or Nursing Homes, Sheltered Housing, HMO's, Flats, high-rise tower blocks, Hotels, Bedsits, Boarding School or College or University Halls of residence.
 - Any School or Education premises – Nursery, Primary, Junior or High School, Colleges, Universities.
 - Selected Heritage sites.
 - Large Industrial sites (COMAH).
 - National Critical Infrastructure.
14. SYFR will respond to AFA calls in line with the SYFR Control Mobilising policy at any time of day or night where there is a sleeping risk, or the premises is a domestic property if the AFA is sounding.
15. Those premises in scope (point 10) will receive advice and guidance from Fire Control taking the call, to identify if the response to the call needs to be reviewed based on the information provided. If the caller requires further non-emergency advice, they will be signposted to Business or Community Fire Safety department. As part of the call questioning process, our mobilising staff ask clear and specific questions to determine if there are signs of fire.
16. If any doubt exists over the potential of an emergency occurring, or the caller's cognisance to fully provide information regarding the situation, Fire Control will be authorised to mobilise 1 pumping appliance to proceed to the incident to investigate.
17. Where information gathered suggests there is likely to be an incident occurring at an address, then Fire Control will mobilise the full Pre-Determined Attendance for the relevant incident type (or utilise mobilising discretion to reduce the attendance based on the information gathered, with a full rationale of the decision taken entered onto the incident narrative log).

18. The assessment of the last 3 years of AFA statistical data shows that the number of incidents requiring any form of intervention following mobilisation to AFAs, is very low – less than 0.4% of attended incidents based on the information gathered (May 2019).
19. An amendment in PDA does not normally constitute a consultation process. However, key stakeholders will be consulted during the amendments of related policies.
20. This change would be in line with National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) best practice guidance, which incorporates learning from all the fire and rescue service in the United Kingdom (UK) to shape our risk management and mobilising processes.
21. Any proposed change in policy may be communicated through the following channels:
 - Local media channels, Local Authority publications, posters etc; allowing enough time for them to get equipment checked and maintained and to make contingency plans and seek advice;
 - Individual mailing to premises that often have alarm actuations as follow up;
 - Prepare for further calls from affected organisations who may have questions;
 - Section on SYFR external web page with information / FAQs to support local businesses.
22. The advantages of this proposed change are:
 - Appliance movements will be reduced, and firefighter and public safety improved through less emergency blue light responses to calls that are statistically false or unwanted;
 - Appliances will be available for other emergency calls;
 - Fuel and mobilisation costs will be reduced;
 - Appliance wear will be reduced;
 - Opportunity for prevention and community engagement work will be increased;
 - Opportunity for crew training and development will be increased;
 - Attendance times improved.
23. Following research and discussions with neighbouring FRSs and a sample of those further afield with regards to their policy of attending commercial AFAs, it was found that of this sample:
 - 54% no longer attended unconfirmed commercial AFAs at any time (including Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire locally, and other Metropolitan brigade West Midlands nationally);
 - 22% no longer attended during general 'day shift' hours (including West and North Yorkshire locally);
 - The remainder are all either currently considering or reviewing their current procedure (including Humberside and Lincolnshire locally).
24. Options for consideration detailed below.
25. **Option 1** – Any time of day / night – Unconfirmed AFA call received – No attendance made by SYFR, and the ARC to be advised to contact key holders to investigate the actuation (or follow the pre-determined actions as advised by the organisation/ premises);

Option 2 - the following PDA to be mobilised:

- Between 08:00hrs and 19:00hrs – Unconfirmed AFA call received – No attendance.
- Between 19:00hrs and 08:00hrs – Unconfirmed AFA call received - 1 pumping appliance attendance.

Option 3 – Do nothing and continue with the existing mobilising procedure.

26. This will apply to all commercial premises with the exception of:

- Sleeping Premises (including such premises as hospitals, care homes, hotels etc.).
- Any School – Nursery, Primary, Junior or High School, [Colleges and Universities](#) (~~not including colleges or universities~~).
- COMAH Sites.
- Heritage Sites.

Recommendation

27. The recommendation is to progress Option 1 in conjunction with consultation from Business Fire Safety, Corporate Communications and commence with education of business premises and ARC to be informed of the change of SYFR policy. It is during this consultation that a go live date will be established and fully communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

28. The approval of Option 1 would then assist with facilitating the previously approved paper 'Charging for Unwanted Fire Signals'. The monitoring and invoicing would be reduced as we would be attending only those commercial premises which contained a sleeping / residential risk to investigate AFAs; these would be the only premises requiring monitoring (and subsequently charging) for compliance with the UWFS policies.

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR ASPIRATIONS

- Be a great place to work-** we will create the right culture, values and behaviours to make this a brilliant place to work that is inclusive for all
- Put people first-** we will spend money carefully, use our resources wisely and collaborate with others to provide the best deal to the communities we serve
- Strive to be the best in everything we do-** we will work with others, make the most of technology and develop leaders to become the very best at what we can be

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Yes
- No

If you have ticked 'Yes' please provide brief details in the box below and include the third party/parties it would involve:

Opportunities are being explored to engage with other Fire and Rescue Services to influence and adopt similar positions to response.

CORPORATE RISK ASSESSMENT AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY IMPLICATIONS

29. There is no legal duty for a FRA to respond to calls originating from AFA systems for the purpose of establishing whether or not there is a fire. The responsibility for the building and meeting insurance terms and obligations lie with the organisation or the building management company themselves, not SYFR, and this is an area in which efficiency savings can be found. Control operators are trained and will continue to question callers to determine the appropriate response.

EQUALITY ANALYSIS COMPLETED

Yes

If you have ticked 'Yes' please complete the below comment boxes providing details as follows:

Summary of any Adverse Impacts Identified:	Key Mitigating Actions Proposed and Agreed:

No

N/A

If you have ticked 'No' or 'N/A' please complete the comments box below providing details of why an EA is not required/is outstanding:

There is no direct impact on individuals as calls will still be managed on a case by case basis dependent upon the information obtained by the call handler.

HEALTH AND SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT COMPLETED

Yes

No

N/A

If you have ticked 'No' or 'N/A' please complete the comments box below providing details of why a Health and Safety Risk Assessment is not required/is outstanding:

No impact to SYFR staff.

SCHEME OF DELEGATION

Under the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority [Scheme of Delegation](#) a decision *is required / *has been approved at Service level.

Delegated Power

Yes
 No

If yes, please complete the comments box indicating under which delegated power?

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IMPLICATIONS

30. Consider whether this report has any of the following implications and if so, address them below: Diversity, Financial, Asset Management, Environmental and Sustainability, Fleet, Communications, ICT, Health and Safety, Data Protection, Collaboration, Legal and Industrial Relations implications have been considered in compiling this report.

List of background documents		
- SYFR Control Mobilising Policy - CFOA Guidance for the Reduction of False Alarms and Unwanted Fire Signals - Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005		
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