



## Built Environment Section Fact Sheet

# Managing Unwanted False Alarms – Privately Monitored Domestic

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## MANAGING SYSTEM FAULTS AND ALARM MAINTENANCE

### Fire alarms systems

In all buildings with a privately monitored alarm systems there is a need for a structured fire alarm system maintenance schedule to ensure optimum functionality. Detectors in fire alarm systems need to be cleaned, maintained and tested on a regular basis to the manufacturers specifications. Back up batteries may require replacement. Fire “detectors” detect fire but the emergency warning is remote from the detector. A smoke or fire “alarm” operates at the fire location e.g. has a warning/alert device built in.

### ALARM MAINTENANCE AND SYSTEM FAULT RECOMMENDATIONS

Find out from your monitoring / maintenance company how and when to:

- Clean the detectors.
- Test the fire alarm system.
- Check the backup battery.
- Isolate and de-isolate the alarms (when workers in area).

A maintenance contract with your monitoring company (if available) will ensure that when there is a problem it can be rectified quickly. Ask how long it would take for a faulty detector to be replaced and have the answer in writing.

### BUILDING DESIGN PROBLEMS

Ensure that the smoke alarms installed are in the correct position in relation to living / cooking area, air flow and outside influences. The information on our Home Fire Safety Fact Sheet – Smoke Alarms may be of assistance.

### Building Design Solutions

- Ensure that the installed fire alarm system is compatible with the building and the environment.
- Check that detectors are in correct positions.
- Check to see if the floor plan layout has changed since the fire alarm system was originally installed.
- When current fire alarm systems reach the end of their life, ensure the fire alarm system and alarm panel are upgraded to current standards (commonly 10 years but shorter for some detector types).
- Remove unnecessary detectors (in consultation with fire alarm contractor).
- Upgrade buildings to prevent water penetration due to poor internal and external plumbing design.
- Consider building design and layout changes where inadequate ventilation management exists e.g. no door head from bathrooms,
- Provide effective ventilation to draw cooking fumes from kitchen areas past smoke detectors.

## MANAGING BUILDING MAINTENANCE WORKS - DEALING WITH WORKERS/CONTRACTORS

Workers and contractors can unintentionally set off privately monitored fire alarm systems by conducting work such as welding and using heating appliances, mowing and landscaping, cleaning (steam and air blowers), and pest fumigation etc.

- Check that all tradespersons who enter the building are informed of the monitored alarm and that activating the alarm could incur a MFS “avoidable unwanted alarm” attendance fee.
- Be prepared to isolate the fire alarm system (if your system allows it) while contractors are working and de-isolating when they are finished or advise your monitoring company of the situation.
- Ensure that there is always someone on fire watch when contractors are working with the alarm isolated.

## MODIFYING THE FIRE ALARM SYSTEM

There are many possible solutions for minimising unwanted alarms. Modifying the system is the least favoured option however it may be the only solution in some cases. Your alarms contractor or the MFS may be able to assist you. Possibilities include:

- relocating detectors
- changing types of detectors.

## ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF OWNER/OCCUPIER

Pass on all relevant information about the fire alarm system to any caretaker manager or new owner/occupiers.

- Know how to read the fire alarm display if applicable.
- Know how the fire alarm system functions.
- Know the procedure to carry out when an alarm activates.

Check that all residents/occupiers know:

- what to do when the alarm activates
- how to execute their Home Fire Escape Plan (residential buildings)
- where the assembly areas are
- their responsibilities when work is being carried out in the vicinity of smoke / heat detectors, and
- how to live with the fire alarm system.

## FIRE ALARM ACTIVATION

**If the fire alarm activates, the most important thing to remember is that life always takes precedence over material loss.**

What should you do if the fire alarm activates:

- Keep everyone calm.
- Evacuate as per the Home Fire Escape Plan
- Call 000.
- Be visible, meet the MFS on arrival and let them know what you've done so far.

## CHECKLIST

- Always liaise with your fire alarm monitoring / maintenance contractor.
- Ensure regular maintenance and testing of your fire alarm system.
- If planning any building alteration or major works, seek advice from your fire alarm monitoring company before commencing work.

During building or maintenance work:

- Does the work produce dust or fumes in or near an alarm-protected area?
- Will activities involve penetrating or demolishing a wall or ceiling?
- Will welding, gas cutting, use of heat guns, sanding or grinding be carried out?
- Cover smoke detectors during periods of maintenance if work processes are likely to create unwanted alarm activations e.g. painting or dusting. Remove dust covers when work is complete.
- Where smoke detectors are fitted, do not run equipment inside that emits dust or fumes, e.g. grinding machinery or exhaust fumes.
- Ensure smoke detectors are not fitted where smoke or steam are present inside buildings e.g. near toasters, kitchens or showers.
- Ensure maintenance workers or other contractors do not cut fire alarm cabling.
- Inform guests of ways to prevent unwanted alarm activations.