



TORONTO POLICE SERVICE



ALARM RESPONSE POLICY (INFORMATION FOR GENERAL PUBLIC)

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DEFINITIONS

Alarm System

A device or series of devices which emit or transmit a remote or local audible, silent, visual or electronic signal indicating an alarm condition and is intended to summon police response to criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety.

Cancelled Accepted Alarm (CAA)

A request from the Central Monitoring Station to cancel police response **after** the police field unit has accepted the dispatch to attend the alarm.

Company Alarm

A signal activated to alert of an unauthorized entry at a non-residential premise (i.e. business, school, bank, etceteras).

False Alarm

A request, directly or indirectly, to provide police response to a signal from an alarm system indicating that criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety has occurred where no such situation has taken place.

Including:

- an alarm system activated unnecessarily, improperly or for a purpose other than for which the alarm device or system was installed, carried or worn;
- the alarm company or alarm system user testing an alarm system without the prior knowledge of Communications Services;
- where no evidence exists of criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety, which the system was installed/utilised to warn of;
- an alarm system actually or apparently activated by mechanical failure, malfunction or faulty equipment;
- an alarm system activated by negligence or carelessness;
- an alarm system actually or apparently activated by atmospheric conditions, excessive vibrations or power failure.

Hold Up Alarm

A signal activated to alert of a robbery that has occurred, at a non-residential premise (i.e. financial institution (defined as bank, trust company or credit union) or business premise). Includes an alarm signal identified by the alarm industry as a **panic** alarm.

Post Suspension Alarm

A request from the Central Monitoring Station for a police response to an alarm system that is under suspension of police response to alarm signals.

Residence Alarm

A signal activated to alert of an unauthorized entry at a residential premise.

Roaming Personal Safety Alarm

A signal accompanied with audio communication activated to alert of criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety in relation to the person wearing or carrying the device.

Valid Alarm

A request, directly or indirectly, to provide police response to an alarm system activated for the purpose for which it was installed to indicate criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety, as confirmed at scene by attending police officers.

With respect to a Roaming Personal Safety Alarm, a valid alarm means an alarm system activated to warn of criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety in relation to the person wearing or carrying the device, as confirmed at scene by attending police officers.

Verification

A process followed by the Central Monitoring Station to confirm the validity of the alarm signal prior to requesting a police response. (Verification is acknowledged as being a filter only and does not resolve the cause of false alarms).

BACKGROUND

On January 1, 1990, the Toronto Police Service (TPS) implemented an Alarm Response Policy that was aimed at reducing the high number of false alarm events that police officers were attending.

The TPS Cost Recovery Program came into effect September 26, 1996. The Cost Recovery Program had an immediate and significant impact on the number of false alarm events received at Communications Services. At year end 1995, the TPS recorded 72,411 alarm events and of those 69,013 were false. By year end 1997, the first full year of the Program, the total alarm events were reduced to 29,632 and of those 27,981 were false.

ALARM RESPONSE POLICY

It is the policy of the TPS to respond to requests from Central Monitoring Stations to respond to and investigate alarm events where an alarm system has been activated under the following conditions:

- The premise and/or device is not under suspension for police response to an alarm system;
- The Central Monitoring Station is not under suspension per the provisions outlined in the By-Law governing the TPS Cost Recovery Program;
- The Central Monitoring Station has complied with the approved verification process.

The TPS designates four (4) specific types of alarm events:

- Residence Alarm
- Company Alarm
- Hold Up Alarm
- Roaming Personal Safety Alarm

The TPS Alarm Response Policy provides for police response to false alarm events (excluding CAA alarm events) to a maximum of four (4) times in a twelve (12) month period, per alarm system, commencing on the date of the first false alarm dispatch. Following the response to the fourth false alarm event, police response to alarm events will be suspended for a 365 day period.

The Alarm Response Policy requires that **all alarm signals be verified before a request to attend is made by the Central Monitoring Station**. A verified call for service will be dispatched to the first available police field unit at a higher priority level. *A non-verified alarm signal will be dispatched to a police field unit at a lower priority level.* It should be noted that police response is determined by the nature of demand, priorities and resources available at the time of the request for police response.

The TPS will not respond to alarm systems that have been communicated via an automatic dialling device and/or pre-recorded message.

The TPS Alarm Response Coordinator will only administrate issues concerning alarm systems through the respective registered Central Monitoring Station.

Suspension Policy – Premise/Device

The TPS will suspend **police response to an alarm system** once it has incurred four (4) false alarm events within a 365 day period (commencing on the date of the first false alarm event). Police response to the alarm system will be **suspended** for 365 days, effective fourteen (14) days from the fourth (4th) false alarm.

Note: Should a Central Monitoring Station request response to a suspended alarm system (i.e. Post Suspension Alarm), the TPS may accept the call for service. Any such alarm event found to be false will be invoiced accordingly.

When an alarm system has incurred two (2) false alarm events within a 365 day period, a **confidential Special Caution Notice** will be provided to the Central Monitoring Station. The Central Monitoring Station is responsible for informing the appropriate alarm company/dealer or alarm system user that the alarm system has incurred two (2) false alarm events. **It is recommended that steps be taken to prevent police response to additional false alarm events.** (*This includes retraining in the operation of the alarm system and/or hardware upgrading or replacement.*)

It is the responsibility of the Central Monitoring Station (or the alarm company/dealer, where applicable) to notify the alarm user to forewarn of the pending suspension, explain TPS suspension and appeal procedures and establish alternate response arrangements.

When an alarm system has incurred four (4) false alarm events within a 365 day period, police response to the alarm system will be suspended for 365 days. An **Alarm Suspension Notice** will be mailed to the premise/device. A confidential **Suspension Advisory Notice** will be provided to the Central Monitoring Station advising which alarm system(s) will be suspended and the effective date of suspension.

Police response may still be obtained during the suspension period by the Central Monitoring Station, but only if specifically proven to be warranted by definite verification, i.e. multi-zone trips and/or information from someone at the scene.

NOTE: Police response for emergency events may still be obtained by contacting 9-1-1.

Suspension Policy – Central Monitoring Station

The TPS may discontinue police response to requests for response from Central Monitoring Stations when payment of all or part of any fees and interest owing under the By-Law governing the “Cost Recovery Initiative” is outstanding for a minimum of four (4) months from the date the invoice was issued. It is the responsibility of the Central Monitoring Station to take the appropriate steps to notify all affected clients of any invoked suspension of TPS response.

Alarm Disposition Appeal Procedure

The disposition of an alarm event may be appealed should information be obtained that suggests that a **false** alarm was actually **valid**.

The TPS will review all written Alarm Disposition Appeal Requests **submitted by the Central Monitoring Station**. Alarm Disposition Appeal Requests submitted directly to the TPS by an alarm system user or alarm company/dealer will not be accepted.

Alarm Suspension Appeal Procedure

The suspension of police response to an alarm system may be appealed. A minimum suspension period of thirty (30) days must be served, during which time no further false and/or post suspension alarm calls for service have taken place. In addition, a previous suspension appeal review must not have transpired within the past 365 day period.

The TPS will review all written Suspension Appeal Requests **submitted by the Central Monitoring Station**. Suspension Appeal Requests submitted directly to the TPS by an alarm system user or alarm company/dealer will not be accepted.

Approved Verification Process

To assist the alarm industry in reducing the number of false dispatch requests being made to the police, a verification process has been developed. The verification process is used to prevent false alarm signals from becoming false alarm dispositions upon police field unit determination.

The Alarm Response Policy requires that **all** alarm signals (including those alarm signals identified by the alarm industry as panic, duress, invasion, ambush and distress) be verified before an alarm dispatch request is made by the Central Monitoring Station. A verified call for service will be dispatched to the first available police field unit at a higher priority level.

The approved verification process requires one of the following:

Audio Device

The establishment of voice communication with an authorized person at the premise/scene who may confirm that criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety exists.

Cancel Code

The utilization of a feature in the control panel/device that permits the alarm system user to send a unique signal to the Central Monitoring Station that will cancel an alarm signal after it has been sent.

Key Holder

In the absence of a verified alarm signal indicating criminal activity or the imminent threat to personal safety, the Central Monitoring Station shall implement a verification process that attempts to establish communication with an authorized person who can confirm whether or not police need to be dispatched.

Technological Means

The confirmation of criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety using 'cross zoning' technology (multiple alarm activations).

Video Device

The establishment of video communication with the premise or the alarm system user that may provide the Central Monitoring Station with the ability to confirm that criminal activity or imminent threat to personal safety exists.

COST RECOVERY PROGRAM

The TPS Cost Recovery Program was established to address the issues of increased demands for response to monitored alarms compounded by reduced availability of fiscal and human resources. The program permits the TPS to charge a fee of **\$130.00** for any alarm event that has been accepted by a police field unit and is determined to be a **false alarm**. Fees are invoiced monthly to Central Monitoring Stations that have requested police response.

The TPS will invoice a Central Monitoring Station for a cancelled alarm that has been accepted by a police field unit prior to receiving a cancellation request from the Central Monitoring Station. This is known as a cancelled accepted alarm (CAA). The TPS will not invoice a Central Monitoring Station for alarm event that has **not** been accepted by a police field unit. This means that if an alarm event is cancelled during the period of time between receiving the call for service and assigning the police field unit(s) to attend the alarm event, no fee will be invoiced. If however, the cancellation is received after the police field unit has **accepted the call**; the Central Monitoring Station will be invoiced for the false alarm event.

Since its inception, this program has had a profound impact, dramatically reducing the calls for service to false alarms. Today, the TPS is responding to 60% less false alarm calls than responded to in 1995. Consequently, TPS police officers are more available to serve and protect the lives and property of citizens.

ALARM SYSTEM USER

Alarm system users are responsible for:

- Maintaining the premise and alarm system in a manner that will minimize or eliminate false alarms;
- Providing up to date contact names and telephone numbers to the Central Monitoring Station (key holder information);
- Making reasonable effort to have a key holder attend the premise when requested by the TPS to assist with the deactivation of the alarm system, providing access to the premise, and/or providing alternate security to the premise;
- Not activating the alarm system for any reason other than for the purpose of which the alarm system was intended to report.

Alarm system users are encouraged to use the emergency (9-1-1) or non emergency (416-808-2222) telephone systems to request a police response, where applicable. Inappropriate use of an alarm system to request police response may result in a false alarm disposition and subsequent false alarm fee and potential suspension of police response to alarm systems.

CENTRAL MONITORING STATION

Central Monitoring Station (or alarm company/dealer, where applicable) responsibilities include, and are not limited to:

- Providing written and oral instructions to each of its alarm system users in the proper use and operation of the alarm system. The instructions will include all instructions necessary to turn the alarm system on and off and to avoid false alarm events.
- Requesting a call for service in the manner established by the Alarm Response Coordinator.
- Informing the applicable alarm company/dealer or alarm system user when a premise/device has incurred two (2) false alarms in a 365 day period.
- Notifying the alarm system user to forewarn of any pending suspension of police response, explain the TPS suspension and appeal procedures and establish any alternate response arrangements.
- Preparing and submitting of any Alarm Disposition Appeal Requests and/or Suspension Appeal Requests on behalf of the alarm system user.
- Informing all affected clients of any invoked suspension of TPS response related to a Central Monitoring Station suspension.

CONCLUSION

To ensure the availability of police response for true emergencies, the Alarm Response Policy must be complied with.

It is strongly recommended that the alarm system users be encouraged to use the 9-1-1 system when a police response is required to an event considered to be an emergency. Direct contact with Communications Services enables the dispatch of appropriate emergency responders.

The information provided will aid in understanding the TPS Alarm Response Policy. Any questions or concerns may be addressed to the Alarm Response Coordinator between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday to Friday at (416) 808-8860, via email at alarmsprogram@torontopolice.on.ca or by fax at (416) 808-8870.