

**BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**  
**GUIDANCE NOTE**  
**NO 74**

**EXPLANATION OF THE FIRE AUTHORITIES POLICY TO REDUCE THE NUMBER AND IMPACT OF UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS (UFS) FROM PREMISES WITH AUTOMATIC FIRE DETECTION SYSTEMS**

**1. Introduction**

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service have adopted the generic principles of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) model agreement between Fire and Rescue Services and users of remotely monitored Fire Alarm Systems, with an aim to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals that the service responds to. Full details of the scheme can be found on their web site (details attached).

From 1 January 2006, Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service requires owners of Automatic Fire Detection Systems (AFD) and in particular a remotely monitored fire alarm system that continue to generate unwanted calls in non single private dwellings to register their fire alarm system and provide information about the system and the arrangements they have for the maintenance and the reduction of false alarms. These premises will be termed "Designated Premises". This applies regardless of the size of the system, or historical frequency of false alarms. A failure to reduce the number of false alarms will ultimately result in the service not attending an Automatic Fire Alarm unless a fire is confirmed (subject to risk assessment).

**2. Designated Premises**

These are **individual premises** (a site with a number of buildings may need to register each building), with an Automatic Fire Detection system and in general, those monitored by an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC), who fulfil the following criteria:

On receipt of a fire signal, contact the Fire and Rescue Service who upon attendance decide it to be false (unwanted fire signal) and:

**The fire and rescue service receive two or more of these unwanted fire signals in any period of 4 weeks or**

**The fire and rescue service receive three or more of these unwanted fire signals in any period of 26 weeks or**

**The cause of an unwanted fire signal has not been remedied within 7 days of the call.**

Prior to action being taken by the Fire and Rescue Service, the level of unwanted signals from your premises will be assessed to determine an acceptable level of signals that may be greater than those indicated above. The assessment is based upon the number of automatic detectors the premises have, hence it is important that the registration form is completed correctly and clearly specifies the individual building in question. Details relating to the number of detector heads can be obtained from the installer or contractor who holds the maintenance contract for the system.

Once registered, you will automatically be at response level 1. You will be notified of the number of false alarms allowed before dropping to response level 2 and 3.

### **3. Levels of Response**

**Attendance Level 1:** Is an immediate emergency response, resulting in an initial attendance based on a risk assessment of the fire fighting requirements that will be not less than one appliance.

**Attendance level 2:** In the absence of a confirmation call, the service will make an immediate attendance of one Rescue Pump only.

**Attendance level 3:** No response is made until a confirmation of a fire is received from the premises using the 999 system. Such confirmation will result in an immediate response resulting in an initial attendance based up a risk assessment of the firefighting requirements that will not be less than one Rescue Pump.

Designated Premises will be allocated a **Unique Reference Number (URN)**. Each Designated Premises registering will be required to pay an administration fee of £35 (plus VAT) per URN. The fee is subject to annual review but will remain in line with the fees proposed by CFOA.

The application form must be returned within the 21 days.

### **4. Level 1 Response**

Once notified that the Designated Premises are at level 1, and to avoid a reduced fire service attendance, action will need to be taken. You will be given 21 days notice to reduce the number of false alarms and produce an action plan that must be approved by the Fire Authority. If you fail to respond to the letter or the action plan appears inadequate, then ultimately the service level of response will be reduced.

### **5. Level 2 Response**

The Designated Premises will continue to be monitored by the Fire Service on a monthly basis. Whilst the performance remains within the limits of level 1, no further action will be taken, however, where systems are approaching the threshold of a change of response level, and there has been little or no improvement in the performance of the system within 3 months, you will be advised that the future attendance level of the fire and rescue service is again under review

A fire safety audit may be carried out that will include a review of the suitability and sufficiency of the responsible person's fire risk assessment required under the fire safety legislation. Appropriate enforcement action may be taken in accordance with the fire and rescue authority's enforcement policy. If the performance of the system does not return to an acceptable level and your action plan to reduce false alarms appears inadequate, then a revised response level will be applied within 21 days.

### **6. Level 3 Response**

Where there has been no improvement in the performance of the system that has been reduced to response level 2 within a 3 month period and the threshold of performance level 3 has been reached, you will be advised that future attendances are once again under review.

Again a fire safety audit may be carried out by the Fire Service that will include a review of the suitability and sufficiency of the responsible person's fire risk assessment required under fire safety legislation. Appropriate enforcement action may subsequently be taken. If no appropriate action is taken within 21 days then a revised response level to level 3 will to be applied.

## **7. Withdrawal from the scheme**

If the performance of a system fails to improve when level 3 has been reached, the Fire Authority may consider the withdrawal of the URN and therefore the facility to use the services of an Alarm Receiving Centre. You will be informed that the Fire and Rescue service will only respond to confirmation of a fire via the 999 system and that your participation in the scheme is withdrawn (withdrawal of unique reference number). Such action is anticipated only in extreme cases, where no positive measures are being taken in order to improve performance within a period of 6 months from submission of your action plan.

Your Alarm Maintenance Company will be informed that the Fire and Rescue Service will not respond to any calls passed via the Alarm Receiving Company, as such they should inform the Alarm Receiving Company that this is the case.

Where corrective action results in improved performance levels over a sustained period of 3 months, then the level of response is increased accordingly. The process then continues via constant monitoring.

In cases when the Unique Reference Number has been withdrawn, it is at the discretion of the Fire Authority as to whether the Designated Premises can rejoin the scheme. If this is the case then you would have to re-apply paying the appropriate application fee again.

Once the application fee has been paid, the premises will remain registered but will only be designated when they meet the service triggers detailed above.

Note that any reduction in the response made by the Fire and Rescue Service may have an impact on your company's insurance with regards to fire. You would be advised to inform them should our attendance level reduce and especially if level 3 is reached.

## **8. Attendance of Key holders**

An integral part of the policy is the attendance of a key holder. Upon being issued a URN, you must designate at least two key holders, one must be available at all times the premises are unoccupied. The key holder must be trained in the basic operation of the fire alarm system and have a knowledge of how to gain access to the premises and all relevant areas.

The key holder should be in attendance within 20 minutes of being notified by the Alarm Receiving Company (ARC). The ARC will inform The Fire and Rescue Service when the key holder has been mobilised. Any Designated Premises that fail to have a key holder respond in the required time will be notified by the Service and appropriate action should be taken.

Further enquires relating to this policy can be obtained from Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service:

Tel: 01234 351081

Fax: 01234 845035

E Mail: [bedfadmin@bedsfire.com](mailto:bedfadmin@bedsfire.com)

Web:<http://www.bedsfire.com>

Model Agreement between Fire and Rescue Authorities and Users of Remotely Monitored Fire Alarm systems:

The Chief Fire Officers Association  
9-11 Pebble Close  
Amington  
Tamworth  
Staffordshire  
B77 4RD

General: +44 (0) 1827 302 300

E mail: [enquiries@cfoa.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cfoa.org.uk)

Web Site: <http://www.cfoa.org.uk>

More Details regarding guidance on Fire Alarm systems can be found in :

Fire Safety guidance note 60: Automatic Fire Alarm Systems – Avoiding False Alarms.

British Standard 5839-1 : 2002 Fire Detection and Fire Alarm Systems for Buildings – Code of practise for system design, installation, commissioning and maintenance.

A Guide to Reducing the number of false alarms from fire detection and fire alarm systems – ODPM leaflet.