

False Alarm Prevention Tips

What is a false alarm?

The Wichita Alarm Ordinance defines a False Alarm as: “1) the activation of an alarm system in the City resulting in a request for response by law enforcement, fire or emergency medical personnel when a situation requiring a response does not, in fact, exist at the time of activation of the alarm; or 2) an alarm system designed to be used to report a robbery or holdup, when used for any other purpose.”

A false alarm may be the result of, but not limited to, mechanical or electronic failure, malfunction, improper installation, improper adjustment, accidental tripping, misoperation, misuse, defect or negligence of a person.

Did you know?

Three main causes of false alarms are: 1) user error, 2) installation/service errors, and 3) equipment failure?

- More than 80 percent of all false alarms are caused by user error
- There are easy steps you and your alarm dealer can take to prevent false alarms
- False alarms present a serious threat to the effectiveness of our local emergency response personnel, as well as to the safety of our citizens
- False alarms are costly and dangerous because they divert emergency personnel from crime and fire prevention efforts in addition to denying response to true emergency calls

Major Causes of False Security Alarms:

- Unlocked or loose doors/ windows
- Children, Neighbors and Visitors
- Cleaning Crews/ Repairmen/ Pet Sitters
- Pets or other wildlife
- User Error
- Equipment Malfunction

Major Causes of False Fire Alarms:

- Fumes from overcooked food, including burnt popcorn
- Steam from showers
- Dust from construction work
- Incorrect or poorly designed systems
- User error
- Equipment malfunction
- Tampering with the fire alarm system

Before you activate your security alarm system:

- Are you and others who use the security system fully educated on its proper operation? This may include domestic/cleaning crews, children, neighbors, caretakers, employees and temporary staff.
- Make sure you securely close and lock all protected doors and windows.
- If you are leaving your home or business, make sure the door you leave by is closed tight.
- Keep pets, balloons, fans, heaters, etc. away from motion sensor areas.

- Know and rehearse the process to cancel an accidental alarm. Anyone with your key should know this process.
- Know how much time you have after you arm your system to leave and to disarm your system when you enter.

Know what to do if your fire alarm activates:

- First, don't panic. Treat the alarm as though it is a real emergency and evacuate.
- Wait for your Alarm Company or central monitoring station to call, give your password or ID card number.
- If they do not call you, have the number posted by your control panel and contact them to cancel the police dispatch.
- **DO NOT** call 911 to cancel alarm activations--you must call your monitoring station.

Know what to do if you set your security alarm off accidentally:

- First, don't panic. Carefully enter your disarm code to reset your system.
- Wait for your Alarm Company or central monitoring station to call, give your password or ID card number.
- ***Do not leave your home or business until you have talked with your monitoring station!*** If they do not call you, have the number posted by your control panel and contact them to cancel the police dispatch.
- **DO NOT** call 911 to cancel alarm activations--you must call your monitoring station.
- You can arrange to have your alarm monitoring station call you or another designated person first before the police are called whenever your alarm is activated.
- If you are aware of a problem with the system, you can cancel the emergency response dispatch.

At Home:

Avoid objects that trigger your alarm:

- Unlocked, loose fitting, or open doors or windows. Always keep doors and windows locked when the alarm is in an "ON" mode to reduce the chance that friends, neighbors or customers enter and cause the alarm to activate.
- Unsupervised pets - If you have pets, take special care to purchase an alarm system that is tolerant of pets. You may not want to purchase motion detectors if your pets have free run of the house when the alarm is on. Also, sometimes barking dogs can activate glass break detectors.
- Balloons- movement can cause motion sensors to go off.
- Cooking – Smoke from overcooked food can cause your smoke detectors to activate.
- Construction – Advise your alarm company prior to starting any construction at your home.
- **DO NOT** call 911 to cancel alarm activations--you must call your monitoring station.
- Drafts that move plants and curtains.

At your Business:

Watch for these pitfalls that may activate your alarm:

- Swinging doors or windows
- Banners or signs
- Mylar balloons
- Plants or curtains caught in drafts

- Stacked items, such as boxes, which may fall, setting off motion detectors
- Unsupervised guests
- Untrained, unaware or uncaring employees
- Alarm equipment, such as motion sensors or sprinkler heads, being hit by forklifts
- Heating, we sure to keep all heaters away from any type of material that could catch on fire. About 50% of heating fires occurred during the months of December, January and February.
- Construction – Advise your alarm company prior to starting any construction at your business.

Contact your Alarm Company:

- If you plan any home improvements or renovation projects, such as changing phone systems, the configuration of a room, adding a wall, rearranging cubicles, installing skylights or ceiling fans, or even fumigating.
- If you plan to change your alarm system batteries causing an interruption in your systems power supply.
- Also alert your alarm company if you acquire a pet or hire cleaning staff.

Review with your alarm company the procedures you expect them to follow when your alarm activates:

- Do you only want the police notified if exterior and interior zones are both activated?
- Do you only want the police notified after every phone number on the contact list has been called with no contact made?
- Do you only want the police called when they speak to you and you request police to be dispatched?
- Put your instructions in writing.
- Your alarm company is required to make a minimum of two (2) attempts to contact someone on your contact list prior to calling 911. The only exceptions are hold-up, panic, medical, or fire alarm signals which must be dispatched immediately upon activation.

With people:

Enhance your security alarm system's potential:

- Train responders with keys on complete system operation.
- Instruct cleaning staff or repair persons on how to fully operate your system.
- Use dead bolt locks.

False Alarms:

- Disturb neighbors and can cause neighbors to disregard your alarm system when it is activated making your alarm system unreliable and less affective.
- Divert police, fire and emergency personnel from crime prevention efforts and public awareness efforts.
- Delay in response to calls that may be REAL emergencies. This can also compromise the safety of responding authorities, the community and also wastes City resources.

Recommendations:

- Have a maintenance contract with a licensed alarm company and have your alarm system checked every year.
- If you are apprehensive about using your system, call your alarm company TODAY!
- Do your part to prevent false alarms.