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|  | TRAVIS COUNTY ESD #5 MANCHACA FIRE RESCUE Department Best Practices | A708 |
| | Authorized by:  Fire Chief Chris Barron | Effective: 2/6/2018 Rescinds: Reference: AFD A708.3 Application: Shift Personnel |
| Alarm Activation Incidents | | |

I. Purpose

To establish a policy and procedure for response to alarm activations.

II. Background

This document is a direct adaptation of the Austin Fire Department SOG on Alarm Activation Incidents. It has been adopted by Manchaca Fire Rescue as an Auto Aid partner to maximize standardization between partner agencies. Variations and additions to the language from the parent AFD document will be signified by text in italics. Generic changes that do not affect content such as formatting and changing “AFD” to “MFR” will not be noted.

III. Policy

- A. **Scope of response.** MFR shall respond to Fire Alarm Signals and remain on the scene until there is a determination of the cause of the activation at any residential or commercial occupancy.
- B. **Code 1 response.** Response will normally be Code 1, unless upgraded to Code 3 by Fire Dispatch.
- C. **Code 3 response.** Company Officers have the discretion to respond Code 3 based on occupancy type and/or previous history at the incident address. If the Company Officer chooses to upgrade the response, he/she must notify Fire Dispatch by radio.
- D. **Other alarm signals.** MFR will not respond to “Trouble” Fire Alarm Signals, Supervisory Signals or to Security Alarm Signals.
- E. **System malfunction.** MFR will not attempt to repair or reset a fire alarm system or components that cause an alarm activation due to a system malfunction. These alarms shall be treated as a fire code violation.

IV. Best Practices

The following best practices should be followed at all firefighting and emergency scene operations, except where deviation can be justified by Fire Officers. Any significant deviation should be communicated to responding/on-scene units as soon as possible.

A. Response.

1. **Response plan.** There will be a single pumping apparatus response to automatic alarm activations. For an alarm activation in a mid-rise or high-rise building (4 stories or more), a second Company will be added to the response. If an Engine is initially assigned, an aerial apparatus will be added. If a Quint is initially assigned, a pumping apparatus will be added.
2. **Level of response.** The response to automatic alarm activations will normally be Code 1 unless Fire Dispatch receives other information or the Company Officer has reason to believe that a Code 3 response is required. Examples would include occupancies that may require assistance with evacuation such as nursing homes or schools.
3. **Keyholder information.** In addition to the type of alarm, zone, etc., Fire Dispatch will attempt to determine the ETA of the owner/occupant and will advise the responding company of this information. Upon request from the responding Company, Fire Dispatch will utilize the information available in RMS *for incidents within the City of Austin* to contact the property owner and request response from the owner, occupant, property manager or alarm technician. By City of Austin ordinance, the owner of a fire alarm must ensure a response within two hours of being notified.
4. **Cancellation.** Fire Dispatch may cancel an alarm if they can confirm simultaneously from the monitoring company and the owner/occupant that it is an unintentional alarm. In all cases, Fire Dispatch shall inform the responding Company of any pertinent information received. The responding Company Officer may still choose to respond to the scene to verify the information provided to Fire Dispatch and/or if Fire Department assistance may still be needed on scene.

B. Arrival on Scene.

1. **Visual inspection.** Upon arrival at the scene where there is no apparent fire showing, the Company should attempt to make a visual inspection of the interior of the building.
2. **Gaining entry.** If a visual inspection of the entire interior is not possible from the outside (as with multi-story occupancies or large warehouses), every effort should be made to gain entry short of causing major damage. A Knox box with keys for entry or 24-hours on-site security/management is required for all commercial occupancies that have a monitored fire alarm system. *For incidents in the City of Austin, an AFD unit can be requested to access a Knox Box if there is no sign of fire and no AFD unit on scene.* If a Company responding to a fire alarm activation in a commercial building finds no

building personnel on site and no Knox Box, *AFD Prevention should be notified for City incidents and the Battalion Chief notified for incidents in ESD5.*

3. **Nothing showing.** In the event that an audible fire alarm is not sounding and there are no other apparent signs of fire or water flow, the Company shall stand-by until the owner/occupant arrives to allow access if entry cannot be made without causing major damage to the building.
4. **Alarm sounding.** In the event that an audible fire alarm is sounding with no other apparent signs of fire or water flow, and entry cannot be made without causing major damage, the Company Officer shall use his/her discretion as to whether or not to force entry or to merely stand-by. Consideration should be given to the ETA of the owner/occupant.
5. **Clearing without entry.** The Company may clear the scene at the Company Officer's discretion after having been in a stand-by mode for at least 30 minutes without apparent signs of fire or water flow other than the audible alarm if Fire Dispatch has not been able to ascertain an ETA of the owner/occupant. If the owner/occupant has been notified and is responding, the Company shall continue to stand-by until he/she arrives to allow access.

C. Fire Alarm Activation Causes.

1. Actual Fire.

- a. **Upgrade of alarm.** If at any time while on scene, signs of smoke or fire indicate that the alarm activation may be due to a working fire, the Company Officer shall immediately inform Fire Dispatch and request that the alarm be upgraded to the appropriate response for the building type and fire conditions.

2. Unintentional System/Detector Operation with No Fire.

- a. **Reset and educate.** Many times fire alarms activate correctly due to environmental conditions but there is not actually a fire, such as burned food, steam from a hot shower or cigarette smoke. If an alarm system functioned properly but the cause was not a fire, the Company Officer may reset the alarm system. The occupant/owner should be advised how to prevent future unintentional alarms.

3. System or Detector Malfunction.

- a. **Referral of system malfunctions.** A fire alarm system is a vital feature of the fire protection system of any occupancy. If the alarm is malfunctioning, the system must be repaired. Company Officers may silence a malfunctioning alarm but should not reset the alarm. A malfunctioning alarm will be treated as a fire code violation. *For City of Austin incidents*, the Company Officer will refer it to AFD Prevention via email at FirePrevention@austintexas.gov. AFD Prevention will follow up on the violation and document when the correction is completed. *For ESD5 incidents*,

the Company Officer will advise the owner/occupant of the status of the system and the need to correct the system in accordance with fire code requirements. Systems that require further follow up should be referred to the Battalion Chief.

- b. **Fire watch.** In certain occupancies, a malfunctioning fire alarm is considered a critical fire protection system impairment that necessitates a fire watch. When this occurs, the Company Officer should request the assistance of the on-call AFD Fire Prevention Inspector through Fire Dispatch *for City of Austin incidents. For incidents that require fire watch within ESD5, the Battalion Chief may be notified or a County Fire Marshal may be requested to be contacted by phone through Fire Dispatch.*
- c. **Repeated alarms.** Similarly, when Fire units respond repeatedly to alarm activations at the same location, the Company Officer will thoroughly document the circumstances and refer it *to AFD Fire Prevention for City incidents and to the Battalion Chief for ESD5 incidents.*

4. **Malicious or Mischievous False Alarm.**

- a. **Referral of malicious alarms.** An alarm that is intentionally activated by a person when there is no fire is considered to be a malicious or mischievous false alarm. These false alarms are most often pull stations but a detector or broken sprinkler head could also be used to activate the alarm. Company Officers that determine the cause of an alarm activation to be malicious or mischievous should request Fire Dispatch to notify the on-duty Investigator *for City incidents.* The Investigator will determine if a crime has been committed and/or if an Investigator response is warranted. *For malicious alarms in ESD5, The County Fire Marshal may be requested through Fire Dispatch.*

D. **Management of Occupants.**

- 1. **Direction to occupants.** A critical component that must be addressed during a fire alarm activation incident is the management of the occupants. During the investigation of the alarm, the occupants should be directed to a safe area, usually outside of the building, and asked to remain there until the cause of the alarm is determined. Many times, it will be necessary to assign Fire personnel to manage and direct the evacuation of occupants. Be aware that silencing the alarm is often mistaken by evacuated occupants as a sign that it is safe to re-enter the building.
- 2. **Reoccupancy information.** After the cause of the alarm has been determined and it is deemed safe for the building occupants to re-enter the building, the following information should be communicated to the occupants:
 - a. **Cause.** The cause of the fire alarm.
 - b. **Prevention.** If a false alarm, actions being taken to prevent additional false alarms.
 - c. **Appreciation.** Appreciation for co-operating during the alarm and for taking the correct actions.

- E. **Non-fire alarms.** Fire Dispatch will forward any intrusion or burglar alarms to the appropriate law enforcement agency, and will not dispatch Fire emergency response units. Fire Dispatch will advise the responding Company to stage, pending approval to enter from law enforcement units on the scene, anytime they receive information that Fire units are responding to a Fire Alarm with an associated Intrusion Alarm. The Company Officer should use his/her discretion to enter if emergency scene conditions warrant an exception to this procedure.
- F. **Mid-rise and High-rise alarm activations.** Due to the size of the structure and complexity of the fire alarm system, a second Company is added to the response for an alarm activation in a mid-rise or high-rise building (4 stories or more). If only one Company is assigned an alarm activation at a high-rise, the Company Officer should request that the alarm be upgraded to an alarm activation in a mid-rise or high-rise and a second Company will be assigned. Once on scene, the second arriving Company should assist with occupant management, locating the cause of the alarm, and smoke and water removal, as necessary. Also, should the alarm activation in a mid-rise or high-rise be the first notification of a working fire, the early response of two Companies will be beneficial for a safe operation.