

 <p>Cambridge Police Department</p>	POLICY & PROCEDURES		No. 852
	Subject/Title: Security Alarms Systems		
	Issuing Authority: 	Review Date: February 12, 2014	Issue Date: March 17, 2014
	Robert C. Haas Police Commissioner	Effective Date: June 6, 2014	Rescinds:
References/ Attachments: Cambridge Municipal Code: Chapter 8.32 – Security Alarm Systems		Accreditation Standards: 81.2.13	

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this directive is to describe the procedures to be followed with respect to the City's monitoring of commercial and private security alarms. More specifically, how the police department will manage those security alarm systems, which trigger Chapter 8.32 – Security Alarm Systems – of the Cambridge Municipal Code, to include the following:

- Receipt and tracking of security alarm system activations;
- Responsibilities of officers who respond to a reported commercial or private security alarm activation; and
- The procedures to be followed involving the false activations of commercial or private security alarms within the City in accordance with Chapter 8.32 – Security Alarm Systems – of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

II. POLICY:

It is the responsibility of the Cambridge Emergency Communications Department to process any reported commercial or private alarm activation that is reported into the center. All such reports will be promptly entered into the Computer-Aided Dispatch System and the appropriate number of police units will be dispatched to investigate the cause of the security alarm activation as a reported crime in progress. Upon notification, police officers assigned to respond and investigate the activation of a commercial or private security alarm will do so without delay and thoroughly investigate the cause of the activation of the alarm.

III. GENERAL GUIDELINES & CONSIDERATIONS:

The overall management and process for how commercial and private alarm accounts are monitored and received by the Emergency Communications Department is under the general control of the Emergency Communications Department (ECD). It is the responsibility of the personnel of ECD to monitor and/or receive the notification of an alarm activation, as well as record and dispatch the appropriate number of public safety personnel to investigate and determine the causation of the alarm. In the case when it is believed to be an activation of a false alarm, responding personnel are charged with the responsibility of ruling out an attempt or unauthorized entry or commission of a crime involving the protected premises. Also, ECD will be responsible for keeping track of false alarm activations for each location in the city during the course of any one calendar year.

Officers who are dispatched or responding on reported security alarm activations are to respond to such occasions without delay. Until determined otherwise, alarm activations are to be treated as though there may be a breach in the security system or the commission of a crime. Upon arriving at the location where there has been an activation of a security alarm, officers are to take steps to maintain their own safety while they are checking into the cause of the alarm activation. Officers are expected to thoroughly check a location to either verify a breach or attempted breach may have taken place, or determine if the alarm activation was false.

Often officers will encounter someone at the scene of an alarm activation, who may have inadvertently caused the alarm activation. In these cases, the investigating officer(s) should verify it was accidental alarm activation and obtain the name of the person(s) present with whom they spoke. The investigating officer(s) will report their findings, noting the name of the person(s) present to the ECD dispatcher, who in turn will make the appropriate notes in the CAD entry.

In those instances, where the responding officers cannot detect a breach that may have contributed to the alarm activation, they will report their findings, noting to the ECD dispatcher that the commercial property or premises was secure, and once again the ECD dispatcher will make the appropriate notations in the CAD entry. Depending upon the circumstances, the investigating officers may request the ECD dispatcher to make notification to the emergency contact person to either let them know of the alarm activation or request a response to the location.

When the investigating officers believe that the alarm activation was false in nature, it is extremely helpful for recordkeeping purposes and for following up for such false alarm activations for officers to determine to the best of their ability the causation for the alarm activation. When officers are in doubt as to the underlying reason for the alarm activation, the responding officers may request the ECD dispatcher to make contact with persons who are listed on the emergency contact list. It will be the responsibility of the ECD dispatcher to capture information that is transmitted by the investigating officers and to reflect what action they may have taken with respect to resolving the incident.

Much of this directive is devoted to describing the process in which false alarm activations will be tracked and how the provisions of the Cambridge Municipal Code, Chapter 8.32 – Security Alarm Systems – will be implemented. The primary purpose of these procedures are designed for the sole purpose of reducing the overall incidences of false security alarms, and more specifically, repeat false alarm activations from the same location.

IV. DEFINITIONS:

A. Security Alarm Systems: For purposes of this directive, the following types of alarm conditions are considered to be a security alarm for a residential property, business or commercial property that may include, but not necessarily limited to the following:¹

1. Break & Entry / Burglar Alarm;
2. Motion Detection Alarm;
2. Hold-up Alarm;
3. Intruder Alarm;
4. Panic Alarm;
5. Robbery Alarm; and
6. Audible Alarm

B. False Alarm Activation: For purposes of this directive, a “false alarm activation” is defined as an activation of a security alarm system through mistake, mechanical failure, malfunction, improper installation, lack of prudent maintenance, failure to notify prior to testing, intentional activation not involving a criminal incident, or through negligence of the occupant of the residence and/or building in which the alarm system is located, including their employees or agents.

V. PROCEDURES FOR RESPONSE:²

A. Monitoring of Security Alarm Systems: The Emergency Communications Department is charged with the responsibility of monitoring and initiating steps on the report of any security alarm activation that is communicated to the department. All alarm activations will be treated as an actual crime event in

¹ The provisions of Chapter 8.32 – Security Alarm Systems – of the Cambridge Municipal Code, specifically 8.32.010 exempts alarm systems owned and/or operated by the agencies within the City government.

² CALEA Std. **81.2.13** – *A written directive establishes procedures for monitoring and responding to private security alarms.*

progress, unless it is communicated that such activation was caused in error or by mistake.

1. Upon receipt of an activation of a security alarm system, ECD personnel will record the information relative to the location and type of alarm being transmitted.
2. All alarm conditions will be treated as a crime in progress until such time it has been determined that the alarm condition is determined to be a false activation of an alarm system (i.e., advance call from the subscriber at the location or notification from the alarm company).
3. ECD personnel will be responsible for dispatching the appropriate number of police personnel to investigate the cause of the alarm.
4. ECD personnel will record all pertinent information relative to the alarm activation, to include the name(s) of the persons officers may have spoken with during the course of their investigation.
5. ECD personnel will note the suspected cause of the alarm activation.

B. Police Response to Alarm Activations: Upon notification of an activation of an alarm system, officers assigned to the call will respond without delay to investigate the cause of the alarm.

1. Depending upon the type of security alarm activation, officers will respond in accordance with the established procedures outlined by the department. For example, officers will respond to a bank alarm in a certain way, as compared to a break & entry alarm of a residence or an intruder alarm.
2. Responding officers should always use tactical methods while investigating the cause of an activation of an alarm, so as to protect themselves until they determine there is no threat present.
3. Should the officers determine that the alarm was the result of an actual intrusion, unlawful entry, robbery, etc.; the responding officers will adhere to the investigative protocols prescribed for each of these situations, ensuring that the proper reports documenting the incident and investigation are submitted.
4. When officers determine that the activation of the alarm was accidental, false, malfunction of the system, etc., the officers should report their findings back to the ECD dispatcher, who will record their findings as part of the CAD record of the incident.
 - a. Officers should be mindful that what might appear to be an activation of a false alarm, might be a rouse/ploy on the part of the perpetrators to disable an alarm so that they can commit a crime undetected.
 - b. Investigating officers should make every attempt to ascertain the cause for the false alarm, and report their findings to the ECD dispatcher, to include the names of any individuals they might speak with during the course of

their investigation. This information is extremely useful in terms of establishing whether the alarm occurrence will be subject to the False Alarms section of the Municipal Code.³

- c. During the course of their investigations, officers may feel it is prudent for ECD personnel to contact persons on the Emergency Contact List⁴ and/or the alarm company for the purpose of having such persons respond to the scene. This is generally applicable when officers find unsecured entries that cannot be secured, or if officers need to gain entry into a building to further their investigation.
- d. Officers may also elect to have ECD personnel notify persons on the Emergency Contact List if the alarm system cannot be reset or restored prior to their clearing from the scene.
- e. All actions taken by the officers, including their final determination for the cause of a false activation of an alarm system should be made part of the CAD record. Further, anytime an officer feels there are extenuating circumstances or concerns regarding the false activation of an alarm system, the officer should be documenting those concerns or issues within a police report.

VI. PROCEDURES FOR TRACKING SECURITY ALARM SYSTEMS:

- A. Maintenance of Emergency Contact Lists:** The Municipal Code provides that “every alarm user” is to submit the name and telephone number of at least two other persons who can be contacted and who are authorized to respond to an activation of the alarm system, and can open the premises in which the alarm system is located.⁵
1. It will be the responsibility of every alarm user/subscriber to maintain a current and accurate list of those individuals who can be contacted in the event of an activation of the alarm system.
 - a. This information can be furnished on the Emergency Contact Information Worksheet form that is maintained by ECD (see attached form #852A).
 2. It will be the responsibility of ECD to maintain the information from the Emergency Contact List as part of its notification system.
 3. Periodically, ECD will check on the accuracy of this information in an effort to keep it current and up to date.
 4. If during the course of attempting to make contact with individuals on an Emergency Contact List it is determined that the information is no longer

³ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

⁴ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.040 (A) – Alarm User’s Responsibilities.

⁵ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.040 (A) – Alarm User’s Responsibilities.

accurate, ECD will send a request to the alarm user/subscriber requesting updated information.

5. If it is learned that an alarm user/subscriber has failed to provide emergency contact information relative to a security alarm system, ECD will send out a request to the alarm user/subscriber requesting that the Emergency Contact Information Worksheet be completed and submitted.
6. If the alarm user/subscriber fails to respond to such requests, the alarm user/subscriber may be subject to a fine as prescribed by the Municipal Code.⁶

B. Notices for False Alarm Activations: It will be the responsibility of ECD to monitor the number of false alarm activation occurrences for each calendar year. Once any particular alarm user/subscriber meets the threshold for the number of false alarm activations in a given calendar year, the Director of Operations for ECD will transmit that information to the department's Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit. Upon receipt of such information, the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit will take the following steps:

1. *False Alarm Activation Warnings:* Upon being notified that an alarm user/subscriber has had at least two separate false alarms within a calendar year, the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit will ensure that a notice is sent to the alarm user/subscriber as prescribed and in accordance with the Municipal Code.⁷ The notice will contain the following information at minimum:
 - a. The advisory notice will indicate that at least two false alarms have been received within a calendar year, and any future occurrence of a false alarm will result in an assessment of a fine as established by the Municipal Code.
 - b. A listing of the alleged dates, times and locations of the false alarm occurrences.
 - c. Notice that the alarm user/subscriber is required to submit to the Cambridge Police Department within ten (10) working days of the receipt of the letter a report describing the efforts made by the alarm user/subscriber to discover and eliminate the cause or causes of the false alarm occurrences (refer to **Section VI., subsection B. 2** for additional information).
 - d. A listing of the fines associated with future false alarm occurrences within the same calendar year.
 - e. The penalties associated with failure to comply with the provisions established by the Municipal Code.
 - f. A copy of a blank Emergency Contact Information Worksheet to provide the alarm user/subscriber to update this record and submit it to ECD.

⁶ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.070 (E) – Violations – Penalty.

⁷ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (A) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

2. *Waiver of Prior Alarm Occurrences:* The Municipal Code allows for the Police Commissioner (i.e., Chief of Police or designee) to waive prior false alarm occurrences, provided the alarm user/subscriber has submitted a written response to the advisory notice describing what steps were taken to eliminate or reduce false alarms.⁸ If a written report is submitted by the alarm user/subscriber describing what actions have been taken to resolve the prior alarm occurrences, the following steps will be taken to determine whether prior false occurrences will be forgiven:
 - a. All written responses to the alarm advisory notices will be forwarded to the attention of the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit. Although the Municipal Code provides that all written correspondence be done in the form of certified mail,⁹ such correspondence may be accomplished through email exchanges, which in essence accomplishes the same tracking of correspondence.
 - b. The Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit in consultation with the Commanding Officer of the Administrative Section will determine whether the explanation provided by the alarm user/subscriber is sufficiently adequate to waive the prior false alarm occurrences.
 - c. The Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit will respond to the alarm user/subscriber as to the decision of whether or not to waive prior false alarm occurrences.¹⁰ Once again, the response may be in the form of email, as opposed to certified mail.
 - d. If the prior false alarms occurrences are forgiven, the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit will ensure that the alarm user/subscriber's account is adjusted accordingly.
3. *False Alarm Activation Fines:* Once an alarm user/subscriber has exceeded the number of false alarms that would trigger a warning notice (refer to the preceding section), ECD will continue to notify the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit of any subsequent false alarm occurrences within the same calendar year. As the Officer-in-Charge is notified of subsequent false alarm occurrences, it will be the responsibility of the Officer-in-Charge to ensure that fine invoices are being sent out on a timely basis as prescribed and in accordance with the Municipal Code.¹¹ The notice will contain the following information at minimum:
 - a. A list of the alleged false alarm activations that were subject to the initial warning, to include the dates, times, and locations of those alarm occurrences. Also, a listing of those alarm activations that are subject to

⁸ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (A) & (D) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

⁹ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (A) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

¹⁰ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (D) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

¹¹ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (A); (B); & (C) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

- the fine schedule as established by the Municipal Code,¹² along with the dates, times, and locations of those alarm occurrences.
- b. The total amount of fines that are being assessed.
 - c. Contact information for the employee designated for managing false alarm accounts will be provided on the invoice.
 - d. **Note:** Any requests by an alarm user/subscriber to forgive any of the chargeable occurrences should be submitted in writing, which will then be forwarded to the attention of the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit.
4. *Payment of Fines:* The Municipal Code provides a fine schedule for the number of false alarm activations that exceed the two occurrences within any given calendar year, provided that prior occurrences have not been forgiven.¹³
- a. Upon being notified of a false alarm occurrence, the Records Management Unit employee charged with the responsibility of tracking false alarm occurrences, will update the department's records system, and will be responsible for generating an invoice for all billable alarms.
 - b. Upon receipt of payment of an invoice, it will be directed to the attention of the Records Management Unit employee charged with the responsibility of managing the payable accounts for false alarms. It will be that individual's responsibility to record the payment, and process the payment for transmission to the City Treasurer's Office.
 - c. Failure of the alarm user/subscriber to pay two consecutive fines assessed within sixty days of the assessment will subject the alarm user/subscriber to an additional penalty of fifty dollars.¹⁴
5. *Assessment Penalties:* The Municipal Code provides for the assessment of penalties for failing to comply with provisions of Chapter 8.32 – Security Alarm Systems.¹⁵
- a. Penalties as prescribed by the Municipal Code may be assessed if the alarm user/subscriber fails to obey an order to discontinue the use of an alarm system, after the exhaustion of the right of appeal.¹⁶
 - b. Penalties as prescribed by the Municipal Code will be assessed if the alarm user/subscriber has failed to pay two or more consecutive fines assessed under subsection C of Section 8.32.050.¹⁷

¹² Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (C) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

¹³ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (C) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

¹⁴ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.070 (D) – Violation – Penalty.

¹⁵ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.070 – Violation – Penalty.

¹⁶ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.070 (A) – Violation – Penalty.

¹⁷ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.070 (D) – Violation – Penalty.

- c. Penalties as prescribed by the Municipal Code may be assessed if the alarm user/subscriber fails to comply with the requirements as set forth in subsections A, B and C of Section 8.32.040.¹⁸
- d. An additional penalty will be assessed to an alarm user/subscriber in which payment for any outstanding fines goes 30 days beyond the first sixty day violation period, and additionally for 30 days thereafter until the outstanding alarm fines and penalties have been paid in full.
- d. Any penalties assessed against an alarm user/subscriber will be in the form of a Municipal Code citation that is to be issued by the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit (sworn officer), that is either hand delivered or sent certified mail.

C. Procedures for Appealing False Alarms, Fines, or Penalties: The Municipal Code provides for an appeal process whereby an alarm user/subscriber may challenge the occurrence of false alarms, fines that might be assessed, or penalties levied for failing to comply with the Municipal Code.¹⁹

1. *Challenging False Alarm Occurrences:* The Municipal Code does allow for an alarm user/subscriber to challenge the notice of the first two separate false alarm occurrences within a calendar year, provided the alarm user/subscriber submits in writing within ten working days of receipt of the advisory notice (refer to **Section IV, subsection B**) the efforts on the part of the alarm user/subscriber to discover and eliminate or reduce false alarms.²⁰
 - a. Although the Municipal Code specifies that the written notice must be in the form of certified mail, the use of an email exchange will be considered equally acceptable.
 - b. Most appeals at this level will be handled by the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit (sworn officer), and may be in consultation with the Commanding Officer of the Administrative Section.
 - c. The written challenge must have sufficient specificity so that the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit can determine whether there has been a good faith effort to correct the problem which was serving as the underlying cause of the false alarms, or the cause of the alarm was through no fault or responsibility of the alarm user/subscriber (e.g., caused by an act of God, weather conditions outside the control of the alarm user/subscriber, or actions by a utility company that resulted an alarm transmission).
 - d. If the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit believes there was sufficient cause to forgive the past false alarm occurrence, the Officer-in-Charge has the authority to do so. The decision of the Officer-

¹⁸ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.070 (E) – Violation – Penalty.

¹⁹ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.060 – Appeal Procedures.

²⁰ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (A) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

in-Charge of the Records Management Unit will be communicated in writing (email serving an acceptable method of written communication). The written notice should advise the alarm user/subscriber of any fines that might be waived, however, the notice will also advise the alarm user/subscriber that they will be subject to the assessment procedures on the next false alarm occurrence.²¹

2. *Appealing Decisions Not to Waive Alarm Occurrences:* If an alarm user/subscriber wishes to challenge the decision not to waive alarm occurrences and/or fines, the alarm user/subscriber may appeal the decision within five (5) working days in writing (the appeal may be in the form of an email). All such challenges will be referred to the Commanding Officer of the Administrative Section.
 - a. The Commanding Officer of the Administrative Section has the authority to grant the appeal, or when an appeal is denied, consult with the Police Commissioner prior to denying an appeal.
 - b. The decision on the appeal will be in the form of a writing (an email will be an acceptable method) outlining the reasons for granting or denying the appeal.
 - c. All decisions made by the Police Commissioner after the appeals procedure has been completed as it relates to Section 8.32.050, are final.²²
3. *Appealing Violation Penalties:* If an alarm user/subscriber chooses to challenge any penalties that may be assessed for violations of this Municipal Code, all such appeals or failure to pay (within the prescribed period time) will be processed in accordance with M.G.L. c. 40, § 21D.
4. *Failure to Pay Fines and/or Penalties:* If an alarm user/subscriber fails to pay any fines and/or penalties within 90 days of the second violation citation, the matter will be referred to the City Solicitor's Office for consultation and subsequent legal action.

D. Monthly Status Report: It will be the responsibility of the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit to provide a written report to the Commanding Officer of the Administrative Section on a monthly basis. Each monthly report will be submitted no later than 10 days into the following month. The monthly report will summarize the status of the false alarm activation monitoring. The monthly report will contain the following information:

1. The number of advisory notices that had been sent out during course of the month.
2. The number of invoices that had been sent out for those alarm accounts that had tripped the fine schedule, to include the total amount of outstanding fines.

²¹ Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.050 (D) – False Alarms – Assessment Schedule.

²² Refer to Cambridge Municipal Code, § 8.32.060 (B) – Appeal Procedures.

3. The number of citations that were issued for any penalties that had occurred during the prior month, to include the total amount of penalties assessed.
4. A listing of those alarm accounts that are over due in payment for fines and/or penalties that exceed 90 days.
5. A listing of those alarm accounts that have been referred to the City Solicitor's Office for follow up action.
6. A summary of any issues or problems that may have been encountered during the month. Any recommendations relative to the process of monitoring/tracking the false alarm occurrences, the accounting process for fines and penalties, or any other suggestions that may serve to improve the process.

E. Technical Assistance & Support: The Commanding Officer of the Administrative Section will confer with the Commanding Officer who oversees the Community Service Unit with respect to providing technical assistance and/or support for those alarm accounts that seem to have an overabundance of false alarm activations. It will then be the responsibility of the Commanding Officer overseeing the Community Service Unit to do the following:

1. Confer with the Commanding Officer of the Community Service Unit in assigning an officer from the unit to follow up with those alarm users/subscribers that appear to have an inordinate number of false alarm activations.
2. It will be the responsibility of the officer assigned to work with alarm users/subscribers to identify ways they can reduce and/or eliminate the number of false alarm occurrences.
3. The officer assigned to work with the alarm users/subscribers should submit an internal report through his/her supervisor detailing the action taken and recommendations designed to resolve the issues.
4. A copy of this internal report should also be forwarded to the Officer-in-Charge of the Records Management Unit to be kept on file in the event further action is required in response to future false alarm activations.