

Tips to Help Prevent A False Alarm

Major Causes of False Alarms

- Unlocked or loose doors
- Children, neighbors, visitors or repair technicians
- Cleaning crews
- Pets
- User error
- Equipment malfunction

Before You Activate Your Alarm System

Are you and others who use the security system fully educated on its proper operation? This may include office personnel, cleaning crews, children, neighbors, caretakers, realtors, employees and/or 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 balloons, pets, fans, heaters, plants, etc., away from motion sensor areas.
- Know and rehearse the process to cancel an accidental alarm. Anyone with an entry key should know this process.
- Know how much time you have after you arm your system to leave, and how much time to disarm your system when entering.

What To Do If You Set Off Your Alarm By Accident

- First...DON'T PANIC. Carefully enter your disarm code to reset the 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, then have their number posted by your control panel and contact them to cancel the alarm dispatch. Do not call 911 to cancel an alarm activation – you must call your monitoring station. You can arrange to have your alarm monitoring station call you or another designated person BEFORE the police, fire or medical personnel are called whenever an alarm is activated. Then, if you are aware of a problem with the system, you can cancel the alarm dispatch.

Review With Your Alarm Company The Procedures You Expect From Them

- Do you want the alarm company to attempt to call more than one person on your contact list before requesting police dispatch?
- Do you want the police notified only if an exterior and an interior zone are BOTH activated?

- Do you want to name a private guard service for your alarm company to call for response to an intrusion alarm activation instead of the police, thereby saving police resources and eliminating false alarm fines?

—Always put your instructions in writing—

How To Be Better Prepared

- Train responders and staff with keys on the complete system operation.
- Instruct staff or repair persons on how to fully operate your system.
- Use deadbolt locks.
- Expand your protection with an alert neighborhood watch.

Avoid Conditions That Can Trigger The Alarm

- Tighten loose fitting doors or windows. Keep doors or windows locked when the alarm is “ON” to reduce the chance that friends, neighbors, or customers can enter and activate the alarm.
- If you have pets, 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, barking dogs can activate glass break detectors.
- Mylar balloons, banners or signs, as well as seasonal decorations can activate motion detectors.
- Drafts can move plants and curtains causing motion detectors to sound the alarm. Also, close and secure swinging doors.
- Stacked items, such as boxes, may fall and set off motion detectors.
- Untrained, unaware or careless employees, as well as unsupervised guests/visitors.
- Alarm equipment, such as motion sensors or overhead door magnets being hit by forklifts.

Contact Your Alarm Dealer

- If you are planning renovation projects or home improvements such as changing phone systems, room configuration, adding a wall, re-arranging cubicles, installing skylights, ceiling fans, etc.
- If you plan to fumigate.
- If you plan to change your alarm system batteries, causing an interruption in your system’s power supply.
- If you get a new pet.
- If you hire a private contractor (cleaning crew, domestic help, realtor, etc.)

Have A Maintenance Contract With A Licensed Alarm Company

- Have your system checked every year.
- If you have apprehensions about using your system, call your alarm company TODAY!

CHARLES COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



Equal Opportunity County

Department of Emergency Services

P.O. Box 2150 • La Plata, Maryland 20646
301-609-3404 • MD Relay: 711 • Relay TDD: 1-800-735-2258



Learn more at
www.CharlesCounty.org

Mission Statement – The mission of Charles County Government is to provide our citizens the highest quality service possible in a timely, efficient, and courteous manner. To achieve this goal, our government must be operated in an open and accessible atmosphere, be based on comprehensive long- and short-term planning, and have an appropriate managerial organization tempered by fiscal responsibility.

Vision Statement – Charles County is a place where all people thrive and businesses grow and prosper; where the preservation of our heritage and environment is paramount; where government services to its citizens are provided at the highest level of excellence; and where the quality of life is the best in the nation.

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**Charles County
Emergency Services**

False Alarm Reduction & Prevention



**Did you know that Charles County
emergency personnel respond to
over 20 false alarms each day?**

False Alarms...

Divert emergency resources away
from true emergencies
Are a nuisance to you and your neighbors
Make your security system less reliable
Cost you and your community money

**You can make a difference...
and be part of a solution!**



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False Alarm Reduction Unit (FARU)

Charles County police, fire and emergency medical services personnel respond to over 8,000 false alarms each year. It is estimated that Charles County’s false alarm response rate has resulted in the waste of approximately 4,000 emergency personnel hours and many thousands of dollars annually. These unfounded alarm calls reduce the effectiveness of emergency services and undermine their ability to respond to legitimate, critical calls. Alarm legislation was adopted to address this abuse and waste of emergency resources and to reduce unnecessary safety risks posed to county emergency response personnel and citizens during a false alarm response.

What Is A False Alarm?

Ordinance 98-48 defines a **False Alarm** as an **Alarm Dispatch Request** to the police, fire or emergency medical services where emergency responders find no evidence of medical need, criminal offense or attempted criminal offense, or, after completion of a timely investigation of the Alarm Site, the senior fire officer determines there is no evidence to support activation of the fire alarm system. This simply means that if emergency personnel respond to an alarm signal and, after investigation, find no evidence to support the alarm activation, the response personnel will designate the alarm signal as a false alarm.

False Alarm Reduction Unit

The False Alarm Reduction Unit (FARU) of the Charles County Department of Emergency Services was created to administer Ordinance No. 98-48. The FARU’s main function is to reduce the number of false alarms to which police, fire and emergency medical services respond to each year. The FARU licenses alarm businesses, registers alarm users, sends notification of false alarms and levies civil monetary penalties for excessive false alarms to alarm users, provides advance notification to alarm users and alarm businesses of applicable renewal dates, ensures that appropriate inspections and upgrades of alarm systems occur, administers the False Alarm Appeals Process, develops and administers a public information program to educate alarm system users on provisions of the False Alarm Ordinance, proper maintenance and use of alarm systems, and assists in our goal to reduce false alarms in Charles County.

Alarm User/Alarm Business Information

Every alarm company conducting business in Charles County must obtain an Alarm Business License (ABL) from the FARU at an annual fee of \$100. An alarm business must ensure that an alarm user’s system is registered before the system is activated or placed into service. An alarm business must collect from their alarm users the initial alarm registration form and fee and deliver to FARU prior to activating or placing the system into service. Non-compliance will result in the alarm business being fined \$300 and the alarm user being fined \$150 for every false alarm dispatch request.

- An annual \$20 registration fee must be paid with each registration form and a separate registration must be obtained for each alarmed location, both residential and non-residential. (Registration does not apply to car alarm systems.) Registration fees are waived for alarm owners 62 years of age or older and, on a case-by-case basis, for individuals with medical alert alarms, the infirm or physically challenged, and for Charles County Government, Charles County Board of Education, College of Southern Maryland, State of Maryland, Federal and Municipal alarm users (proper documentation required). Registration fee waivers do not exempt individuals from paying false alarm response fees.
- Alarm businesses must provide their ABL license number and the alarm user’s registration number to 911 Police/Fire/EMS Communications when requesting dispatch to an alarm activation.
- If you do not have an alarm company, you may obtain registration information directly from the FARU.
- Alarm registrations are not transferable from one alarm user to another or from one location to another. If changes are made regarding the alarm company, mailing address, or contact person information, alarm users are required to advise the FARU in writing of change(s), but are not required to re-register their alarm system.
- Alarm users and/or alarm businesses must notify the FARU when there is a relocation or change in ownership. The old registration must be canceled and a new one issued.

What Your Alarm Company Should Do For You

In an effort to reduce false alarms, alarm companies are required by law to take certain proactive measures.

- An alarm business must ensure that an alarm user’s system is registered before the system is activated or placed into service. An alarm business must collect from their alarm users the initial alarm registration form and fee and deliver to FARU prior to activating or placing the system into service. Non-compliance will result in the alarm business being fined \$300 and the alarm user being fined \$150 for every false alarm dispatch request.

- Alarm businesses must attempt to verify every alarm signal before requesting emergency dispatch (with the exception of duress, hold-up, special medical or water flow signal alarms).
- If it is determined that an alarm signal is false, alarm businesses must immediately attempt to cancel the emergency dispatch.
- Alarm businesses must notify alarm users in writing within 72 hours if they have requested an emergency dispatch to the alarm user’s alarm location.
- When a new alarm system is installed in a home or business, the alarm business must provide the alarm user with an installation certification, certifying that:
 - the system meets or exceeds installation standards;
 - all persons responsible for the operation of the system have been fully trained on its proper use.

How the Law Works

Charles County False Alarm Ordinance No. 98-48 provides for three (3) “free” false alarms within a rolling 12-month period for registered alarm systems. On the third false alarm, the alarm user must have the alarm system inspected by a licensed alarm business. The purpose of this inspection is to ensure that all mechanical components of the alarm system are in good operating condition, and to provide the alarm business an opportunity to re-educate users of the system on proper use procedures.

False alarm response fees are imposed beginning with the fourth false alarm, within a rolling 12-month period, at a fee of \$50. Please refer to the detailed **False Alarm Response Fee Schedule** shown in this brochure.

On the sixth false alarm within a rolling 12-month period, the alarm user must have the alarm system upgraded to meet current county installation standards.

Non-permitted alarm systems, however, are subject to a \$150 citation and assessment penalty for each alarm dispatch request.

Alarm users are considered in violation of the alarm ordinance if they:

- fail to register their alarm system(s);
- fail to pay imposed false alarm response fees; or
- fail to upgrade the alarm system, as required.

For information about the False Alarm Reduction Unit, please visit:
www.charlescounty.org/es/faru

False Alarm Response Fee Schedule

Below are fees charged to alarm users for emergency response to false alarm activations. Fees apply only if emergency personnel are dispatched to the alarm location and the alarm signal is false.

# of False Alarms	Action(s) Taken	Response Fee
1 st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification from FARU 	\$0
2 nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification from FARU 	\$0
3 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification from FARU Inspection of System Required 	\$0
4 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification from FARU 	\$50
5 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification from FARU 	\$150
6 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification from FARU Modification/ Upgrade of System and/ or Additional User Training Required 	\$150
7 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification from FARU 	\$150
8 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification of Suspension of Permit from FARU Notification Made to Insurance Co. 	\$200
9 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification of Suspension of Permit from FARU Notification Made to Insurance Carrier 	\$200
10 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-Site Written Notice Letter of Notification of Suspension of Permit from FARU Notification Made to Insurance Carrier 	\$200
11 th & Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 10 false alarms in a rolling 12-month period may be cause for automatic revocation of AR 	\$300
Non-permitted Alarm Systems Whether expired, revoked, suspended or never acquired will be subject to a citation and assessment penalty for EACH alarm dispatch request, in addition to any other penalties which may apply (Section 13.0 Fines, (C)).		\$150