



ANN ARBOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

Standard Operating Procedures

4.03 Automatic Alarms



AUTOMATIC ALARMS

Effective: January 2, 2026
Scheduled Review: January 2, 2028
Approved: Fire Chief Mike Kennedy

I. PURPOSE

Response to false automatic fire or medical alarms creates risk by having fire apparatus needlessly respond to emergency traffic and depletes available fire resources. In accordance with [Chapter 93 – Alarm Systems of the Ann Arbor Code of Ordinances](#), the fire department will pursue cost recovery for false automatic alarms. The rationale of charging for false alarm response is to encourage property owners to repair their fire alarm systems or be diligent about not having false medical alarms.

II. DEFINITIONS AND FEES

Below definitions are excerpts from [Chapter 93 – Alarm Systems of the Ann Arbor Code of Ordinances](#)

Alarm system - detection device or an assembly of equipment and devices arranged to signal the presence of a hazard requiring urgent attention or to which the fire department is expected or requested to respond. The term includes any system that can electronically cause an expected response by fire department to a premises by means of the activation of an audible signal, visible signal, electronic notification, or video signal, or any combination of these signals. The term "alarm system" includes, but is not limited to, the following types of devices: "medical alarm," "local alarm," "temperature fire alarm," "manual fire alarm," "fire alarm," "automatic sprinkler," "water flow alarm," "carbon monoxide alarm," "carbon dioxide alarm," "supervisory alarm," "tamper alarm," or other alarm indicating a service or hazardous condition. Alarm systems designed solely to alert or signal persons within the premises in which the alarm system is located shall not be regulated by this chapter, unless such alarm systems employ an audible signal emitting sounds, or flashing lights or beacons, or "silent" signals to emergency officials or monitoring agencies, designed to signal persons outside the premises.

False alarm - activation of an alarm system through mechanical failure, faulty equipment, malfunction, improper installation, lack of prudent maintenance, triggering by an animal, testing without prior written notice to the city, or the negligence of the alarm user (or of his, her, or its employees, agents, guests, residents, or invitees). The activation of an alarm system is a false alarm when a fire department investigation reveals no fire or potential fire, or need for medical attention when the alarm system was activated. False alarms that are intentionally activated shall not constitute a false alarm for purposes of this chapter but may be prosecuted as criminal offenses. The activation of an alarm system is not a false alarm when it is caused by any of the following:

- a) Weather events or other condition beyond the control of the alarm user.
- b) Disruption or disturbance of telephone or public utility company facilities.



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- c) Utility pole accidents.
- d) Testing of the alarm system after prior notification has been received by the Police Department or Fire Department.
- e) Intentional and non-malicious activation of an alarm system due to a reasonable belief that Police Department or Fire Department response was needed but was actually not necessary.

Chapter 93, Section 7:403 of the Ann Arbor Code of Ordinances allows for the billing of false alarms. Fire department response to false automatic fire alarms is assessed a \$250 fine. First alarms are not free. All responses fitting the criteria are invoiced.

III. RESPONSE

A fire apparatus shall respond to all dispatched fire alarms, and a National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) report shall be completed. All automatic fire alarms shall be investigated to determine the reason for alarm transmission, verify no hazard exists at the occupancy, and verify the reset and operational condition of the fire alarm system.

If a cancellation is received after dispatch or while enroute, the fire apparatus shall respond "normal traffic."

If there is an impairment to the alarm system, please reference SOP 4.02 Fire Watch.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

The NERIS classification is part of the determination on whether an invoice is issued. The NERIS incident type code is what the incident was, not what the fire department was dispatched to. Only incidents with the following NERIS incident type codes will be assessed the false alarm fee.

- Medical, Other, Medical Alarm
- No Emergency, False Alarm, Accidental Alarm
- No Emergency, False Alarm, Malfunctioning Alarm
- No Emergency, False Alarm, Intentional False Alarm
- No Emergency, False Alarm, Other False Call
- Public Service, Alarms (Non-Medical), CO Alarm

The below examples are meant to provide guidance for company officers when assigning NFIRS incident type codes.

Example #1.

The fire department is dispatched for a smoke detector activation. The cause was determined to be a cooking incident that created smoke or steam.

Classification: No Emergency, False Alarm, Accidental Alarm

This incident will be invoiced.



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Example #2.

The fire department is dispatched for a contained fire in an oven. The cause was determined to be a frozen pizza left in the oven which caught fire.

Classification: Fire, Structure Fire, Confined Cooking / Appliance Fire

This incident will not be invoiced

Example #3.

The fire department is dispatched for a water flow detector activation. The cause was undetermined, for there is no fire or sprinkler activation.

Classification: No Emergency, False Alarm, Other False Call

This incident will be invoiced.

Example #4.

The fire department is dispatched for a smoke detector activation. The cause was determined to be contractors doing dry wall work set-off a smoke detector.

Classification: No Emergency, False Alarm, Accidental Alarm

This incident will be invoiced.

Example #5.

The fire department is dispatched for a smoke detector activation. The cause was determined to be smoking, smudging, or vaping.

Classification: No Emergency, False Alarm, Accidental Alarm

This incident will be invoiced.

Example #6

The fire department is dispatched for a medical alarm. The cause was the individual accidentally hit their pendent triggering the alarm, and there was no medical issue.

Classification: Medical, Other, Medical Alarm. This incident will be invoiced.

The narrative shall clearly state the following:

- A. What was the dispatched incident, e.g., smoke detector activation, water flow detector.
- B. What was found upon arrival.
- C. What caused the automatic alarm to activate.
- D. Actions of the fire department.
- E. Status of the automatic alarm upon fire department leaving the occupancy.
- F. Who the occupancy was left with.
- G. Who is responsible for the fire alarm system, e.g., building owner, manager, or property maintenance company.



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V. REVIEW AND BILLING

The management assistant is assigned to review all NERIS reports to determine applicability of the Chapter 93, Section 7:403 of the Ann Arbor Code of Ordinances. If the incident is applicable, an invoice is sent via the City of Ann Arbor Finance Department's invoice system. The fire chief will review invoice disputes.