



City of St. Louis
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

False Alarm Fact Sheet

- In 2004, the St. Louis City Police Department received over 60,000 burglary alarm notifications. The vast majority of these alarms were false.
- Nationally, 80% of false alarms are related to preventable user errors.
- The three major causes of false alarms are: user error; installation or service errors and equipment failures.
- There are approximately 60,000 alarm subscribers in the City of St. Louis. Of these, approximately 80% are residential. Accordingly, roughly one-third of the nearly 150,000 households (latest Census Bureau statistics) in the City of St. Louis have alarm systems.
- St. Louis' ordinance combines the best from other cities with alarm ordinances and builds upon them. For instance, many cities have a "verified response" policy where police only respond after a potential incident has been verified by someone at the site (a security guard resident, business owner or alarm company employee). Other cities charge for every false alarm. However in St. Louis, police will continue to respond directly to an alarm without requiring proof of a crime. In addition, St. Louis will only charge a fine beginning with the second false alarm.
- Ordinances to reduce the number of false alarms have proven effective when enforced. For example, Montgomery County, Maryland has been enforcing an ordinance for more than a decade. During this time period, the number of registered alarm systems increased 300% but the number of false alarms decreased over 70%. After passing similar false alarm ordinances, the City of Gainesville and surrounding Alachua County, Florida have reduced the number of their false alarms by 68% and 72% respectively over the last five years. Charlotte, North Carolina showed a 30% reduction in false alarms in the first year after passing a false alarm ordinance.

- The City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin says it is getting to high-priority service calls three minutes faster because of its new ordinance which took effect in September of last year.
- Homeowners will be charged an annual alarm permit registration fee of \$25. Business owners will be charged \$50 a year.
- An alarm subscriber will be fined for more than one false alarm in a twelve-month period. The penalties are: \$25 for the second false alarm, \$50 for the third and \$50 plus a 30-day suspension of alarm services for the fourth false alarm within a twelve-month period. Following the suspension, each of the next three false alarms will each carry a fine of \$100. If a subscriber has eight false alarms within a twelve month period, that subscriber will be suspended for one year. No alarm subscriber or alarm business is permitted to send notice to police of an (unverified) alarm sounding related to a suspended subscriber.
- St. Louis' penalties for false alarms are less than in many other places that have initiated an alarm ordinance. In certain Canadian municipalities, there is a \$75 penalty to alarm owners after the 3rd false alarm. Los Angeles has proposed a \$115 fee to alarm customers for the very first false alarm.
- St. Louis Ordinance does take into account "legitimate" false alarms that are not chargeable to residents and businesses. These include alarms activated due to:
 - Criminal activity or attempted criminal activity;
 - Result of weather (lightening, high winds, etc.);
 - Result to a power outage or surge or damage to phone lines;
 - Alarm properly cancelled prior to the officer's arrival;
 - Activated as a result of police radio interference; and
 - Malfunction due to manufacturer's defect of alarm equipment.