False Alarm Ordinance Update

March 6, 2018

SANDY SPRINGS
GEORGIA

Statistics: Ordinance is Working

Date	Total Alarms	Commercial	Residential	Duress/ Panic	Holdup	% False
Oct 1-7, 2017	143	29	99	12	3	100%
Feb 25-Mar 3, 2018	172	52	105	11	4	100%

Disposition of call	Oct 2017	Feb 2018	% Change
Alarm Company cancelled prior to dispatch	36	32	- 11%
False Alarm: Police dispatched (no evidence of crime) or call cancelled by alarm company after dispatch	99	49	- 50%
Cancelled by SSPD: failure to provide permit number, no verification, non-response status	2	87*	+4,250 %
Administrative: Assigned incorrectly, turned over to fire or other issue, cancelled by property owner but determined to be false alarm	6	4	- 66%

* Of the 87 calls cancelled by SSPD, a majority were due to failure to register or verify. Of 33 accounts listed as "non response," only 4 were residential properties

Common Questions

- **Question**: What is a False Alarm?
- **Answer:** False Alarms are those calls made by an Alarm Company to the 911 Center in which public safety personnel are dispatched to a property location in which the call proves to be unfounded
  - Cancelled alarms, where the alarm is cancelled but the officer has already checked the premise, are also considered false alarms
  - An alarm which is cancelled prior to the officer being sent to the premise is not considered a false alarm

Common Questions

- **Question**: When police are dispatched to a call, but the alarm is later cancelled, how does the property owner find out about this false alarm? Why is it determined to be a false alarm?

- **Answer**: In the case where 9-1-1 is called by the alarm company, units are dispatched, but cancelled before arrival, the alarm company receives notification of the false alarm, and the resident is provided a written copy of that notification. However, an alarm company is able to call ChatComm and receive an immediate status update

  We use dispatch of officers as a trigger of a false alarm as the needed action takes our units out of service to respond to the call

Common Questions

- **Question:** How many false alarms can I have before being placed on a non-response list? How will I know?
- **Answer:** Following four false alarms within a 24-month period, a property may be placed on a non-response list

  Every time a false alarm is recorded, a notification is sent to both the alarm company and alarm user. Prior to being placed on a non-response list, the alarm company and alarm user are notified

  - False alarms under appeal do not count towards the total false alarms until the appeals process is concluded
  - Because of the business relationship/contract between alarm company and its customer, it is a reasonable expectation that the alarm company will keep the customer informed of response status and their ability to monitor and place appropriate alarm calls on your behalf

Common Questions

- **Question**: Putting a residence/business on a non-response list is going to make the community unsafe.
- **Answer**: In 2018, an average of 99 percent of all alarm calls from monitoring companies were false.
- Properties with 4 or more false alarms are nuisance alarms. Removing these from police response improves safety as officers are able to respond to actual crime
- The greatest danger is to police officers who, because of the routine nature of false alarms, may let their guard down when danger is actually present
  - Giving officers more time to spend patrolling and focused on actual crime prevention, rather than responding to false alarms, will enhance the police department's efforts in protecting the overall community
- Property owners are notified in advance of their non-response status, and it is hoped that the alarm company and property owner will work together to resolve the issues related to repeated false alarms

Common Questions

- **Question**: What happens if an alarm is triggered late in the night and a residence is on a non-response list?
- **Answer**: We urge residents to use an alarm system as a tool, not a crutch. If an alarm is activated in the middle of the night, people are home and there is reason to believe a danger is present, **CALL 9-1-1** immediately

Do not rely on your alarm company for rapid police response. Calls coming in from alarm companies are placed as low priority calls due to their ongoing 99% + failure rate

Calling 9-1-1 directly provides the most immediate response

Common Questions

- **Question**: How do I appeal a false alarm?
- **Answer**: Under the Ordinance, Alarm Companies are held accountable for false alarm calls. As such, it is the alarm company who is fined and may appeal an assessment of a false alarm
  - As it is the alarm company which is assessing the alarm user for any fines received, alarm users should contact their alarm company if they feel they have been incorrectly assessed
  - Alarm users can assist in the appeals process by providing detailed reasons for the appeal and any supporting evidence which can assist the alarm company with the appeal submission

Appeals Website Copy

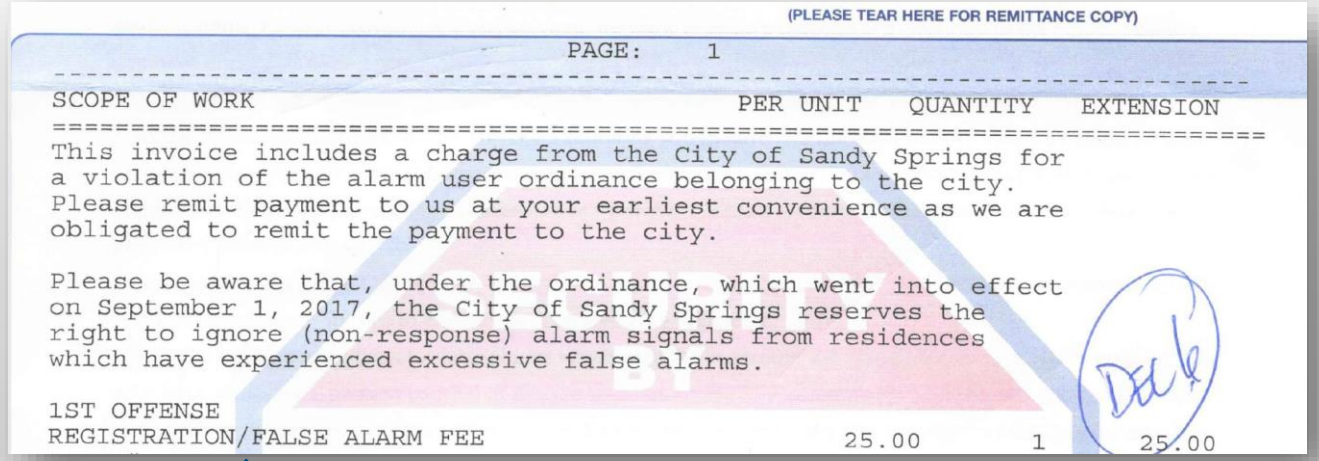
- Alarm Companies may appeal an assessment of a false alarm fine or permit suspension to the Alarm Administrator by submitting in writing the reasons for the appeal within ten (10) days of the date of the notice sent.
- Appeals should be sent to: sandyspringsga@publicsafetycorp.com or mailed to: PO Box 102117, Atlanta, GA 30368-2117.
- Please include alarm company name and permit number, the alarm customer's name and permit number, alarm location, date of the false alarm, reasons for the appeal, and any supporting evidence. An appeal form is available for the alarm company to use in filing by the City's administrative vendor, CryWolf.
- Alarm users assessed fees by their alarm company need to appeal those fees directly to the Alarm Company. An alarm user can work in cooperation with its alarm company by providing information which can be used in the appeal filed by the alarm company. It is suggested that the alarm user check with the alarm company regarding false alarm policies, including a non-payment policy, pending an appeal of a false alarm.

Common Questions

- **Question**: How do I, the alarm user, reduce the chance for a false alarm?
- **Answer**: Work with your alarm company to ensure that the equipment is well-maintained and that all users within the home or business know how to properly operate the system
  - Make sure the contacts you provide your alarm company for Enhanced Verification are the best contacts to help your alarm company determine if an activation merits a police response
  - Make sure you have your monitoring company's phone number saved in your mobile phone, so you recognize the number should they call you
  - When a false alarm does occur, identify the cause and correct
  - Upgrade your technology to video/audio verification as soon as possible
- Additional tips are provided on the city's website – sandyspringsga.gov/alarm

Common Questions

- **Question:** I was charged a registration fine. I registered my alarm with the initial Ordinance. Why was I fined?
- **Answer**: With the Ordinance change in 2017, all alarm companies are now required to register their customers. Past, individual registrations were removed from the system
  - Individuals are not responsible for alarm registration. It is the responsibility of the alarm company to register its customers.



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SCOPE OF WORK	PER UNIT	QUANTITY	EXTENSION
This invoice includes a charge from the City of Sandy Springs for a violation of the alarm user ordinance belonging to the city. Please remit payment to us at your earliest convenience as we are obligated to remit the payment to the city.			
Please be aware that, under the ordinance, which went into effect on September 1, 2017, the City of Sandy Springs reserves the right to ignore (non-response) alarm signals from residences which have experienced excessive false alarms.			
1ST OFFENSE REGISTRATION/FALSE ALARM FEE	25.00	1	25.00

Letter sent to alarm user from alarm company

Common Questions

- **Question**: If an alarm company is a chronic abuser, how does that affect the property owner?
- **Answer:** The alarm company is fined per false alarm per property address. The alarm company has the option to pass that fine on to its customers as an added fee, but the Ordinance itself does not fine any resident. Those fees are between the alarm company and its customers

  An alarm company can be placed on a non-response status if the alarm company fails to register the company or its customers or fails to pay its fines in accordance with the Ordinance. By meeting the minimum requirements of the Ordinance, an alarm company is easily able to avoid a non-response status for these reasons
- Registration and payment of fines is an Alarm Company obligation. As the alarm company is the holder of its customer database, it is not only the alarm company's responsibility to inform its customers of any non-response status, the alarm company is the only entity which has the information about the customer to be able to make that contact

Common Questions

- **Question**: Communication from my alarm company is confusing. Is there a better place to get answers to my questions?
- **Answer**: If you are not receiving clear information from our alarm company, it should raise a red flag in terms of overall customer service, especially as you are paying a fee for service
- Your first call with questions should be your alarm provider
- Information regarding the City's Ordinance and general information about implementation of and assessments can be found on the City's website at sandyspringsga.gov/alarm. Additional questions can be asked by calling the City's Call Center at 770.730.5600

Common Questions

- **Question**: Why was the change needed? It is an added burden on my alarm company.
- **Answer**: The change was needed as 99+ % of all monitored alarm calls are false. In 2016, there were more than 11,000 false alarm calls, costing the city more than $775,000 in administrative costs. More importantly, because public safety resources are tied up responding to false alarms, they are not available to respond to a real emergency
- Having a monitored alarm system is a personal choice and is a contracted agreement between the alarm company and its customers. It is the ONLY for-profit, private sector industry which bases its business model on response by taxpayer-supported services (police & fire response)
  - It is the responsibility of the alarm company to ensure customers and systems adhere to local and state policies managing equipment and processes
- The policy now aligns the alarm companies with other businesses which deal directly with their customers. For example: Consumers contract with utility companies for phone, Internet, television and garbage services. Consumers deal directly with their contracted provider regarding service, issues and billing
- When installing lines within a neighborhood, utility companies follow a permitting process (parallel to registration for alarm companies). The first point-of-contact for residents for questions and issues is the utility company. The City provides penalties to the company for failure to comply with rules and regulations

Questions