

Background

Burglar, panic and robbery alarms serve as useful deterrents to crime. Burglar alarms not only reduce your chances of being burglarized, but also can reduce the amount of property loss during a burglary. Robbery and panic alarms provide a sense of security for users by providing a fast and automated way to summon the police.

The Fairfax County Police Department responds to over 45,000 alarm calls a year. Ninety-five to ninety-eight percent of the alarm calls are determined to be false. This results in an annual waste of 26,000* staffing hours. Alarm legislation was adopted to address this waste of emergency services in an attempt to keep police officers available for criminal complaints.

What is a False Alarm

Fairfax County Code 8.1 defines a false alarm as any alarm signal that elicits a response by police personnel, and there is no evidence of criminal activity to justify a police response. This simply means that if the police respond to an alarm signal and, after investigation, find no evidence of criminal activity, the alarm will be deemed false. This includes, but is not limited to, accidental activations, equipment failure and user unfamiliarity.

False Alarm Reduction Unit

Fairfax County's False Alarm Reduction Unit (FARU) was established to administer County Code 8.1, Security Alarm Systems. FARU's mission is to reduce false alarms in the county through education, training and, when necessary, assess fees for excessive false alarms.

FARU registers alarm users, holds educational seminars and levies civil monetary penalties for excessive false alarms to alarm users, 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 anyone to help reduce false alarms in Fairfax County.

* Estimate based on:
- 98% false alarm rate,
- 2 officers dispatched per call
- 20 minutes to handle the call

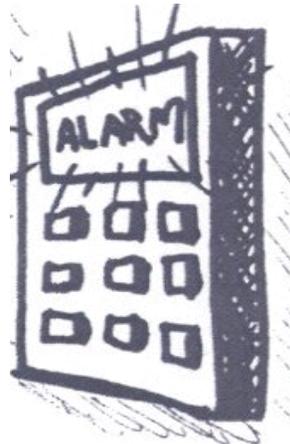
Alarm User Registration

Every alarm system, both residential and non-residential, must be registered with the FARU before the system is placed into service. It is the alarm or alarm monitoring company's responsibility to provide users with alarm registration information at the time of an alarm system sale or installation. A \$10.00 registration fee must be paid with each registration form and a separate registration must be obtained for each alarmed location. (Registration does not apply to car alarm systems.) Registration fees may be waived on a case-by-case basis, for individuals with medical alert alarms, the infirm or physically challenged, and for county, state and municipal government facilities. Registration fee waivers do not exempt individuals or entities from paying false alarm response fees.

If you do not have an alarm or alarm monitoring 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. Alarm users and/or alarm companies must notify the FARU when there is a relocation or change in ownership. The old registration must be canceled and a new one issued. If changes are made regarding the alarm company, mailing address, or contact person information, alarm users are required to notify FARU in writing.

Alarm or alarm monitoring companies must provide their DCJS license number and the alarm user's registration number to 911 Police Communications when requesting dispatch to an alarm activation.



Alarm Company's Responsibility

All alarm companies operating in Fairfax County shall be licensed to do business within Fairfax County and shall comply with all the licensing, registration, certification and training requirements established by the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services pursuant to Code of Virginia, Sections 9-182 and 9-183. Failing to comply with licensing requirements may result in the suspension of service to the alarm company's customers.

An alarm company that installs, causes to be installed, permits to be installed, alters, maintains, repairs, replaces, services or monitors any alarm system shall meet the following requirements:

-  An alarm company shall ensure that an alarm user has registered the alarm system with the Police Department's False Alarm Reduction Unit before the alarm system is activated or placed into service.
-  An alarm company must provide the alarm user registration form to all of its current and future residential and non-residential alarm users, collect the form and registration fee from the alarm user and deliver the completed alarm registration form and registration fees to the False Alarm Reduction Unit before the system is activated or placed into service.
-  An alarm company shall provide to the Police Department, when requested to do so, a list which contains the name, address, telephone number and registration numbers of all its current alarm users in Fairfax County.
-  An alarm company shall notify the Police Department or designee of any alarm user who has a service contract with or is monitored or maintained by the alarm business, who has canceled or otherwise terminated their alarm services with the alarm company.

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Alarm Ordinance Summary

Every alarm user must register their alarm with the Fairfax County Police Department's False Alarm Reduction Unit, through their alarm company before the system is activated and must pay a non-refundable registration fee. (County Code § 8.1-3-4)

Alarm System Requirements

- Alarm systems shall not transmit a pre-recorded message, or code signal directly to a 911 telephone in police dispatch center. (County Code § 8.1-3-3)
- Alarm systems installed after January 1991 shall meet the following installation standards: (County Code § 8.1-3-5-a)
 - Equipped to prevent false alarms during power outages.
 - Shall not have an audible device that sounds for more than fifteen (15) minutes without resetting.
- Alarm systems installed after July 1999 shall also meet the following installation standards: (County Code § 8.1-3-5-b)
 - Alarm system must have a secondary or back-up power sufficient to operate the system in a non-alarm status for a minimum of four hours. An alarm activation shall not occur during switch-over between primary and secondary power.
 - Alarm systems must be U.L. listed.
 - Installed under the National Electric Code (NEC) and manufacturer's standards.
 - Hold-up alarms requiring push button activation must use a simultaneous two-button activation, or conform to U.L. standards.

The False Alarm Reduction Unit must collect an escalating false alarm fee from the alarm user for each false alarm from the user's alarm system over two (2) in a 12-month period, which begins with the registration date or the first false alarm date unless the fee is waived for good cause. The false alarm response fees start at \$50.00 for the third false alarm and escalate to \$500.00 per false alarm. The failure of an alarm user to make payment of any fees imposed under this may result in the suspension of the alarm user registration and a discontinuance of police response. (County Code § 8.1-3-9)

| FALSE ALARM RESPONSE FEE SCHEDULE (Based on a 12 month time period) | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Response | Fee Amount Per Response |
| 1 st | \$0.00 |
| 2 nd | \$0.00 |
| 3 rd | \$50.00 |
| 4 th | \$100.00 |
| 5 th | \$150.00 |
| 6 th | \$200.00 |
| 7 th | \$250.00 |
| 8 th | \$300.00 |
| 9 th or More | \$500.00 |

Upon a notification of the third false alarm within the 12-month calculation period the alarm user may be required by the False Alarm Reduction Unit to have the alarm inspected by an alarm company licensed to conduct business in Fairfax County. Alarm users must submit a completed inspection report within thirty (30) days of the initial notification or be assessed a \$100.00 fee.

In the event that eight or more false alarms occur within any twelve-month calculation period, the alarm user may be required to have their alarm system upgraded to be in compliance with equipment installation standards. (County Code § 8.1-3-10)

Failing to register, pay a false alarm response fee or upgrade the alarm system as required will place the alarm location in a "No Response" category where police units may not respond to future alarms until the location is in compliance. (County Code § 8.1-3-10-c)

Grounds for rescinding, waiving or reducing service fees are outlined in County Code § 8.1-4-2.

The appeal process is explained in County Code § 8.1-4-1

This is an extract of County Code 8.1. All alarm users and alarm companies are responsible for knowing the entire code before activating an alarm system in Fairfax County

GETTING TO KNOW FAIRFAX COUNTY'S FALSE ALARM CODE

(CHAPTER 8.1, SECURITY ALARM SYSTEMS)



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