

**SHROPSHIRE FIRE AND
RESCUE SERVICE**

FIRE SAFETY ADVICE SHEET

**REDUCING AND PREVENTING
FALSE ALARMS**



**A Guide for users of automatic fire alarm and
fire detection systems in
Shopping Centres**

Each year, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service attend more than 2000 calls to incidents that do not require our services. Many of these are caused by unwanted activations of automatic fire detection and fire alarm systems.

Unwanted fire alarm signals (UwFS), often referred to as false alarms, have an impact on the operational efficiency of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) exposing the communities of Shropshire to unnecessary risk. To understand the problems false alarms cause we would like you to consider the following points;

- False alarms also erode the confidence of the users in the value and reliability of the fire detection systems. Consequently, there is a real danger that in the case of a fire, evacuation of premises could be delayed because of previous false alarm experience; and
- Of course, they create unnecessary interruptions to your own activities resulting in substantial costs and inconvenience to yourselves.
- False alarms expose our communities to unnecessary risk as their fire cover is reduced.
- They put other road users, the public and fire fighters at unnecessary risk when responding under emergency conditions.
- False alarms waste fire service resources jeopardising other essential duties including community fire safety activities and training.
- They impose financial burdens in relation to mobilising costs such as salaries of retained fire fighters, fuel overheads, wear and tear of appliances, etc. We estimate that each call costs the council tax payer around £170.
- Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service relies upon Retained (part time) fire fighters. False alarms create an unfair burden upon these officers, as well as damaging the goodwill of their employers who release them from their normal place of work to respond to emergencies.

In shopping centres, this effect is magnified, as an UwFS in your premises will immediately impact upon your neighbouring premises and the centre management team, as well as many members of the public. It is your duty to ensure that you do not place Relevant Persons at risk with unnecessary evacuations, activities that may reduce the effectiveness of a real fire activation or breach your tenancy conditions with your Centre Management.

There are a number of ways that you can ensure you do not generate UwFS, and the following points should be borne in mind when developing your fire safety management strategy and fire risk assessment.

Remember:

- Always read your Tenants Handbook, lease agreement or other emergency plan documents provided by the centre, which will detail the requirements for automatic fire detection, emergency plans etc.
- Ensure that you and your nominated staff are fully aware of the procedures for testing, maintaining and servicing your fire alarms.
- Appoint a qualified 'competent person' to service your fire alarm.
- Inform your Centre Management whenever work is being carried out in your premises. Often the activities of contractors will lead to UwFS.
- Ensure that you have proper procedures for the control of contractors working at your premises e.g. hot work permits. Make sure you know what they are doing, where, and the likely effects of any processes such as the release of fumes from soldering, the disturbance of dust in roof voids or fluctuations of water pressure in sprinkler systems – all these are regular causes of UwFS.
- Smoke detectors don't just activate with smoke. Cooking fumes, vehicle exhausts, dust, aerosols, steam, water, insects etc will also cause your system to operate.
- Seek professional, competent advice on the type of detection in different areas. Ensure you have the correct type for your premises i.e. Smoke detection in an area where cooking or the use of a toaster is common will inevitably lead to a false alarm.
- **Do not** attempt to test your fire alarm without ensuring that a false signal will not be the result – liaise with your Centre Management and find out.

Don't guess or assume anything – find out and be sure!

Should an UwFS occur, and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service attends, you will be handed a partially completed report form giving brief details of the circumstances. Where a system (or unknown) fault is suspected, you must contact your competent fire alarm engineer, who should visit to examine your fire alarm and fire detection system and record their findings on our report form. Finally the completed form should be kept with your fire alarm test and maintenance records. It may be requested following any further UwFS or fire safety audit

Your Centre Management maintains a list a key holders in case access into your premises is necessary out of normal hours. Please ensure that you keep this up-to-date, as this will reduce the time operational crews may have to wait to enter your premises if there are no obvious signs of fire.

For further advice on preventing unwanted fire alarm signals, please contact the False Alarm Reduction Team at Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service on 01743 260260 or 01952 234061