

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the fire and rescue service not have a legal responsibility to attend fire alarms?

Fire and rescue services have no legal requirement to respond to calls originating from automatic fire alarm systems to investigate if there is a fire. We will always attend any premises that confirm their building is on fire through the 999 system.

Business owners and managers have a range of legal responsibilities they must meet as part of their responsibility under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

What is the change?

We will no longer automatically send fire appliances to calls originating from an automatic fire alarm. However, certain premises are exempt from this procedure.

When we receive a call, our experienced control room operators will try to determine whether or not there is actually a fire or whether the call is a false alarm. Where there are no immediately apparent signs of a fire they will ask the caller to hang up and request that the premises check the building for signs of a fire. If any signs of fire exist they should call the us back using the 999 system stating that there is a fire at your address.

Does this procedure apply to all premises?

No. This does **NOT** apply to all premises types and we have determined that the following are exempt from being call challenged.

- Domestic premises including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)
- Residential flats
- Sheltered housing
- Residential care and nursing homes
- Local Primary Care Trust Hospitals and Private Hospitals which have sleeping on site.
- Hotels during night-time hours only (21:00hrs - 08:00hrs), During the day, hotels will be call challenged.)
- Other sleeping risks
- Sites that present a greater risk of injury to firefighters due to the hazards on site and where we have gathered detailed risk information
- Heritage sites listed as Grade 1 or Grade II* by Historic England
- High rise premises with sleeping risk
- A premises not conforming to the above criteria but is locally determined to be unsuitable for call challenging



What will happen if my Alarm Receiving Centre calls the Fire and Rescue Service stating my fire alarm is sounding?

As part of this procedure our control room staff will provide specific details of other information we require from the premises or that the Alarm Receiving Centre must gather. This additional information will determine our response. We will not send fire appliances to non-exempt premises if the only information stated is that the 'fire alarm is sounding'.

Are all alarm receiving centres aware of this change in your procedure?

We are writing to all alarm receiving centres that we have regular contact with to advise them of this change and to provide guidance on what to communicate to their clients.

We would recommend you liaise with your Alarm Receiving Centre to ensure you are prepared for this change. This should include updating your premises fire risk assessment and evacuation plan, and ensure this reflects the appropriate method of summoning the fire and rescue service in the event of a fire emergency via the 999 system, and this is communicated to all staff employed or otherwise at your premises. We also recommend that you contact your insurance provider to make them aware of these changes.

What is a false alarm?

Fire detection and warning systems react to phenomena that might indicate that there is a fire. Most detectors operate as a result of either an increase in heat or the presence of smoke. Unfortunately, they also react to things such as steam, cigarette smoke, aerosol sprays, light smoke from cooking and many other things. Other occurrences could be as a result of a system fault, malicious activation or damage to a device or persons not following the correct procedures when testing the fire alarm system. These causes will result in the fire alarm activating where there is no real fire and this is considered to be a false alarm.

Why is there a new approach to dealing with false alarms?

During 2017, we attended over 3000 calls to automatic fire alarms that turned out to be false alarms. This came at a cost to our organisation of in the region of £900,000.

Attending false alarm calls is a resource intensive drain on our organisation and diverts us away from those that may need us most in emergency situations. It also impacts on the vital prevention work and training we undertake, whilst increasing the risk to other road users and the environment through increased numbers of fire appliance blue light journeys.



What should I do now?

You should do the following:-

- Ensure that the fire risk assessment and evacuation plan for your premises are up-to-date and reflects the conditions within your premises.
- Ensure that your fire alarm and detection system has been properly designed, installed, and commissioned, and that it is properly managed and maintained.
- Ensure that you have people designated to take responsibility for the management and maintenance of your fire alarm system.
- Ensure that in the event of your fire alarm operating, the premises are evacuated, where this forms part of the fire strategy for your premises.
- Ensure that your fire alarm procedures include the designation of specific trained staff to check whether or not there are any signs of a fire, when the fire alarm sounds.
- If any signs of fire are found, ensure that there is a designated member of staff to call the Fire and Rescue Service by calling 999.
- Ensure that any false alarms are properly recorded in the fire alarm log book, including remedial actions taken to prevent a recurrence.

What are signs of a fire?

Signs of fire includes things like, obvious flames, smell or signs of smoke, lights flickering, strange noises or increased heat.

It is important to understand that we are **NOT** asking people to put themselves in danger and are only asking that people look for sign of a fire, not a fire itself.



How should we be checking for signs of fire?

- Remember you're looking for **signs of a fire** and not a fire itself. If there's an obvious fire there's no need to investigate simply phone 999 telling us what has happened and we'll be on our way.
- Where possible, don't search for signs alone. Consider searching in pairs.
- Check the fire alarm panel to find where the alarm has activated – it's vital that you have a full zone or detector plan displayed immediately adjacent to the panel.
- Have another member of staff at the alarm panel and remain in contact (mobile phone or short range radios are ideal for this purpose).
- When investigating **look, listen** and **smell** for signs of fire. It might be smoke, unusual noises or heat and could be any one, some, or all of those signs.
- Before opening a door feel it with the back of your hand, as high up the door as you can reach, for signs of heat. If it is hot **do not** open the door
- If at any time you discover signs of fire, raise the alarm, get out using the nearest fire exit and call the fire service on 999.
- When the call to the fire service is made, clearly state that an investigation has taken place and this is a call to a **FIRE** and not just an alarm sounding.

