NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Community Safety Committee

UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No: 17 July 2009

Date:

Purpose of Report:

To update Members on the work being undertaken to drive down the number of unwanted fire signals responded to by Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

CONTACT OFFICER

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 At the meeting of the Performance Monitoring Committee on 17 April 2009, Members requested information regarding the activity being undertaken to address the ongoing high level of unwanted fire signals (automatic fire alarms) responded to by Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. As this area of work is a core delivery function there is merit in informing the Members of this Committee of the activity being undertaken to improve this area of Service activity.

1.2 The retirement of the previous Unwanted Fire Signals Co-ordinator provided the opportunity to reconsider how this function could best be discharged and this resulted in the work being integrated within the Fire Protection Department. This has mainstreamed this activity more effectively and also provided consequential cashable efficiencies.

1.3 The Corporate Management Board (CMB) report attached at Appendix A presented rationale for changes to the policy appertaining to unwanted fire signals, and the recommendations contained within the report were approved by CMB on 1 June 2009.

2. REPORT

2.1 Since the beginning of 2009 extensive work has been undertaken within the Fire Protection Department to consider the best strategy to deal with the high level of unwanted fire signals received by the Service. The attached Corporate Management Board report sets out the context, and appropriate actions which will be implemented to improve this area of performance.

2.2 The attached report identifies that the Service responds to an average of 17,683 incidents per year, of which 4,550 (25%) are unwanted fire signals (5 year data). National and local statistics demonstrate that over 98% of all automatic fire detection system actuations are not caused by fire, and these result in an unwanted fire signal being received by the Service. Recognition must also be given to the fact that through legislation an increasing number of premises are being fitted with automatic fire detection systems and the number of false alarm incidents would continue to rise if left unchecked. This is in contrast to the total number of incidents the Service responds to which continues to fall year on year.

2.3 Unwanted fire signals are having a significant impact on our service delivery, in terms of lost personnel hours (1581 hours lost last year in 2008 alone) and the unnecessary deployment of essential resources under blue light conditions increases risk, and detrimentally affects other target driven activities.

2.4 In April 2008, all Fire and Rescue Services were recommended to adopt the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) policy to reduce unwanted fire signals. The CFOA policy, and those of six other fire and rescue services have been

considered when refining the policy for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, and this now contains new elements, including call challenging by Fire Control and the provision of operational advice, and potential enforcement activity for persistent offenders.

2.5 Where these types of interventions have been introduced in other service areas there has been a reduction in unwanted fire signals by approximately 25%, and there is an expectation that this performance could be replicated in this Service

2.6 Now that this policy has been approved by the Corporate Management Board work is being undertaken to revise internal procedures and provide appropriate training for staff. It is anticipated that the policy and new way of dealing with unwanted fire signals will be launched in September 2009.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however the implementation of the new policy to deal with unwanted fire signals will generate cashable and non-cashable savings due to a reduction in the number of fire appliance deployments. The attached report (Appendix A) provides full details.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct human resources or learning and development implications arising from this report, however the implementation of the new policy to deal with unwanted fire signals will require an element of training for Fire Control staff and operational crews. The attached report (Appendix A) provides full details.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report is for information only, however an initial equality impact assessment has been completed for the attached CMB report (Appendix A).

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report, however the implementation of the new policy to deal with unwanted fire signals will reduce the number of deployments to false alarms and assist the Service in maintaining an effective response to emergency incidents. The attached report (Appendix A) provides full details.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is provided to inform Members of activity being undertaken to improve performance in the area of unwanted fire signals, and therefore it is recommended that Members endorse the attached report and the ongoing commitment to improve Service performance.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None

Frank Swann
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Corporate Management Board

Unwanted Fire Signals

Report of the Fire Protection Department
Station Manager John Mills

Date: 1st June 2009

Purpose of Report: To provide an insight into how Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) presently manages unwanted fires signals (UFS). By Looking at current policy and procedures and by researching other fire service approaches nationally and regionally.

Recommendations: To implement a new policy relating to Unwanted Fire Signals incorporating a call challenge approach from Fire Control and new methods of managing and reducing this impact on service delivery.

This new policy and process will strive to achieve the following:

- Provide a clear and robust management structure for reducing UFS.
- Reduce the number of false alarms generated by fire detection and fire alarms.
- Reduce the number of UFS sent to NFRS.
- Provide an appropriate response by NFRS to UFS based on risk assessment.

CMB LEAD OFFICER

Name : Mark Huckerby

1. BACKGROUND

National statistics demonstrate that over 98% of all Automatic Fire Detection System (AFDS) actuations are not caused by fires. These unwanted fire signals (UFS) reduce the capability of the fire service to respond to genuine emergencies and the time available to spend delivering other community safety activities.

NFRS attends on average 17, 683 incident calls each year – over 4,550 of these calls are false alarms generated by automatic fire detection systems (AFD). Calls to fires that turn out to be false alarms are now nationally recognised by the fire service as unwanted fire signals.

In August 2004, NFRS introduced its "Unwanted Fire Signals AFA Response Policy" The policy aim was to reduce the impact of unwanted calls and to do this it set out two main approaches:

- Reduced mobilising of appliances where there is no life risk/special risk
- Premises encouraged to adopt an "off line policy"

This policy had a very positive impact and assisted in reducing appliance movement and started to send out the message that NFRS would not keeping attending (UFS) calls without challenging owners, occupiers and responsible persons.

In order to ensure that this policy is still fit for purpose this has now been fully reviewed and the proposed new policy seeks to further reduce Unwanted Fire Signals within non-domestic and make the policy more fully integrated and robust.

This report seeks to ensure that the background and relevant information is provided to allow CMB to make a fully informed decision; when considering the new policy

2. REPORT

UFS are having a significant impact on our service delivery, in terms of lost personnel hours (1581 hours lost last year in 2008 alone) and the unnecessary deployment of essential resources and the negative impact this has on community safety delivery and other target driven activities. It is recognised that UFS levels need to be reduced both nationally and locally.

In April 2008, all Fire Services were recommended to adopt the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) policy to reduce Unwanted Fire Signals. The CFOA policy places the onus on services to implement and manage the policy: this policy has been reviewed along with the UFS policies of the following fire & rescue services:

- Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service
- Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue service

- Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service
- Avon Fire & Rescue Service

NFRS have not adopted the CFOA policy in full. The suggested option is a service wide strategy to reduce the service average of 4,558 calls per year. The policy comprises different elements, including: call challenging by Fire Control and the provision of operational advice and potential enforcement activity for persistent offenders.

2.1 DEFINITION OF AN UFS

At present NFRS, has Policy 2011 in effect. This defines an unwanted fire signal as:

"Any fire alarm signal other than a genuine fire or test signal."

The Fire Industry Association also recognises this definition. BS 5839-1:2002 also defines a false alarm as a fire signal resulting from a cause(s) other than a fire, and further sub-divides these false alarms into four categories:

- Unwanted alarms,
- Equipment false alarms,
- Malicious false alarms,
- False alarms with good intent.

For the purpose of this report, any fire alarm signal that is not a genuine fire shall be referred to as an UFS.

2.2 ORGANISATIONAL IMPACTS OF UFS

False alarms cause a significant drain on NFRS resources. The Service is committed to minimising unwanted fire signals and thus reducing the number of unnecessary mobilisations and their consequential impact on service delivery, business and commerce. A reduction in false alarms will allow service appliances to be available for genuine emergencies. This will also release essential resources to allow for more training, preventative and protection activities to take place. Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service attend in excess of 17,000 incidents each year, 30% of the incidents attended by NFRS in 2008 were calls to UFS

Last year NFRS received 15,807 calls to emergencies of which 4743 calls were to unwanted fire signals.

NFRS finance department estimate the cost of mobilising one appliance to be £240, multiply this by 4743 unwanted fire signal calls and that gives us an organisational cost of £1,138,320 of tax payers' money being spent on responding to UFS.

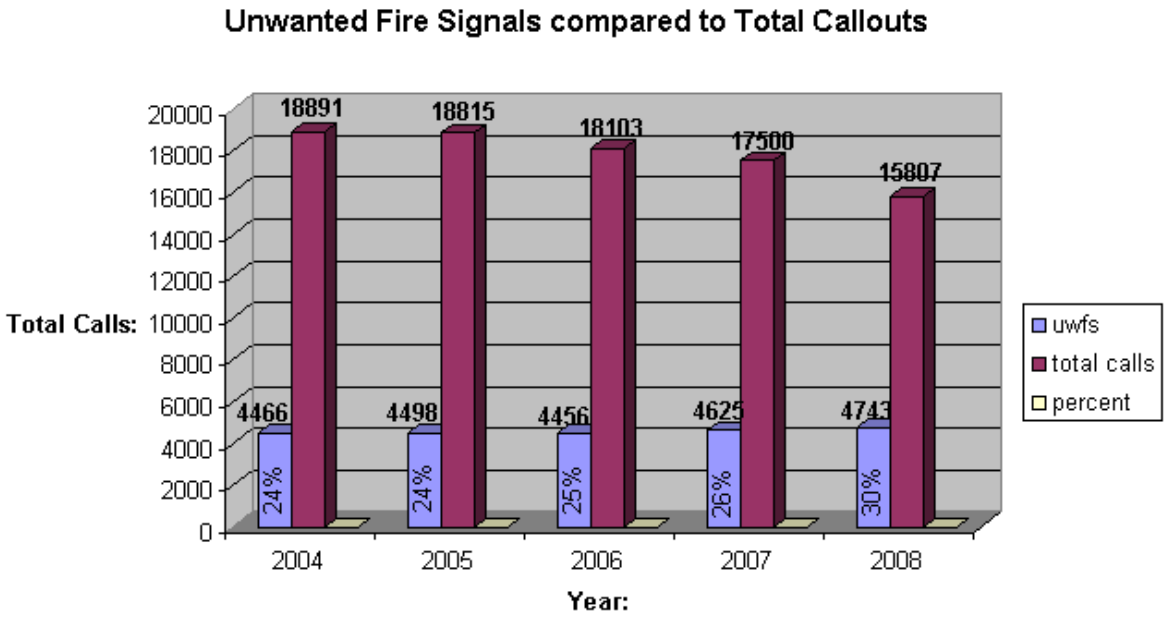


Fig 1.

Figure 1 clearly shows a five year trend in reducing the total number of calls NFRS receives. However this chart also shows the increase in (UFS) calls both in volume of calls and percentage of (UFS) calls compared to total number of calls received.

Each year, Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service attend over 4500 unwanted fire alarms, the majority of which are generated by automatic fire detection systems.

These unwanted fire calls have a major impact on NFRS and cause concern for the following reasons:

- They divert essential Service resources, rendering them unavailable with the possibility of delayed attendance to genuine calls.
- They create unnecessary risk to Fire Crews and members of the public when appliances are responding under emergency conditions.
- They are disruptive to work routines, particularly training and community fire safety activity.
- They have a demoralising effect on personnel attending a high number of false alarms.
- They impose an additional financial burden on the Service.
- They adversely impact upon the employers who release Retained staff for operational duties.
- Unwanted actuation's of alarm systems cause problems for occupiers of

premises in terms of lost production and general disruption to business continuity. They result in complacency amongst staff, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the alarm system, i.e. staff fail to respond appropriately to an alarm actuation.

2.3 UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS INFORMATION

Over the last 5 years NFRS has received a yearly average of 17,800 total calls.

Over this 5 year period NFRS has received a total of 22,788 unwanted fire signals that we have responded to. This equates to a yearly average of NFRS receiving 4,558 unwanted fire signals a year. This figure roughly represents a quarter of the total calls we receive each year. (see table below)

Year	total calls	unwanted fire signals	percentage of calls
2004	18,891	4,466	24%
2005	18,115	4,498	25%
2006	18,103	4,456	25%
2007	17,500	4,625	26%
2008	15,807	4,743	30%

2.4 PERSONNEL HOURS LOST

If we respond to 4,558 unwanted fire signals a year and each call takes 30 minutes from mobilising to return to home station then for each operational member of staff that attends 2,279 hours each year is lost dealing with unwanted fire signals. Then multiply that by 5 for your average crew size and the organisation lose a yearly total of 11,395 hours per year just attending unwanted fire signals.

2.5 PRESENT POLICY

POLICY NUMBER 2011

At present Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has Policy 2011 in effect. This defines an unwanted fire signal as:

“Any fire alarm signal other than a genuine fire or test signal.”

The BFPSA (British Fire protection system association) states that a fire detection and alarm system should be classified as “an unsatisfactory installation” if there are;

- Two or more unwanted fire signals in any 4 week period
- Three or more in any 26 week period
- The cause of unwanted fire signals is not remedied within 7 days.

The policy details two separate approaches, as follows:

APPROACH 1

The mobilisation of one appliance to (AFA’s) where a fire has not been confirmed.

APPROACH 2

Premises are encouraged to adopt an (off-line) policy during core hours, 07:00 to 21:00. (86% of ufs happen during this period).

A competent person investigates any alarm and informs the service using the 999 system.

There are exceptions to these approaches, such as: residential buildings, HIMO’s, domestic dwellings, specific risks etc.

It should be noted that:

- Approach 1, has little or no impact on the number of ufs we receive. However it reduces appliance movement.

- Approach 2, only reduces the ufs we receive between their chosen (off-line) time and this option is voluntary.

POLICY NUMBER 2025

This policy relates to premises that have an AFD system that is remotely monitored by an alarm receiving centre.

It explains the principles of the off-line policy and has appendices that include a standard letter, self assessment form and staff notice etc.

2.6 THE NEW POLICY

- Fire Protection will take departmental ownership of unwanted fire signals, rather than this being the responsibility of just an individual, this will ensure that unwanted fire signals are managed in a consistent robust manner.

- A clearly defined unwanted fire signal strategy will be defined within the policy.

- A robust off line policy will be implemented.

- A new Fire Control "Call Challenging" procedure will be introduced: The essence of this will be to challenge the caller regarding the need for NFRS attendance unless the property type or nature of call meet certain criteria, for example normal PDA's would be mobilised to domestic premises, flats, sleeping risks etc (control will be given a specific list) if there is NO sign of fire and the property does not meet the criteria for mobilising a normal PDA, (i.e.) Offices, shops, various business premises etc then we will not mobilise and we log the incident as false alarm – not attended. In brief, control will no longer just mobilise appliances to AFA's unless certain criteria are met, even if the call comes from an ARC (Alarm receiving Centre). This will be supported with a new fire control procedure.

- Operational crews will be provided with clear guidance on actions to take at an unwanted fire signal, (i.e.) not to reset the alarm, investigate cause, complete an unwanted fire signal form, one copy to the responsible person, one copy to the administrator to input onto CFRMIS.

- CFRMIS will be used to send out standard letters to premises that hit certain triggers (i.e.) two or more unwanted fire signals in any four week period, three or more in any twenty six week period.

- An enforcement Hierarchy is explained within the policy to detail actions to take for consistent repeat offenders.

- Duties by role are clarified from Control – Ops Crews – Point of Contact Officers – Fire Protection – Responsible Person

- Mobilising Flow charts have been designed to assist control in deciding if mobilising an appliance is necessary and to assist crews for actions to take at an unwanted fire signal.

- Call challenging is not the only management tool for reducing unwanted fire signals, regular meetings and reports from representatives of bodies such as the NHS and various partnership meetings must continue and will fall as presently under the remit of the Fire Protection Department.
- However, Call challenging is reported by the Fire & Rescue Services that have adopted it as being the most effective strategy to reducing unwanted fire signals, the reductions reported below were recorded between 6 -12 months of taking on a call challenging policy.

    - Avon report a reduction of 25%
    - Oxfordshire report a reduction of 29%
    - Leicestershire report a reduction of 27% (1,130 calls)

Leicestershire FRS reported in October 2008, Non-cashable savings of £177,300 in July and August 2008. (Based on CLG figure of £1,970 per appliance).

Many other Brigades have similar strategies such as Devon and Somerset, Hertfordshire and Hampshire.

The implementation of this policy will require all relevant staff training, Control, Ops crews, administrators etc.

An internet advice page will be posted on our internet site giving advice to commercial businesses on this new policy and how to reduce unwanted fire signals.

There will also be a press release prior to the policy going live.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Various services have looked into the cost of mobilising an appliance to an incident most Brigades estimate this cost to be somewhere between £300 and £900 per appliance. Interestingly CLG costs mobilising an appliance at £1,970 per call.

Conservatively, the potential cost to our organisation; using the lowest rate of £300 per call, (4,558 calls multiplied by £300) UWS could be potentially costing us £1,367.400.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There will be a requirement to raise awareness of this policy; particularly within Operational Crews and Fire Control. The Ops crews have only slight adaptations to their current processes and it is felt that the awareness raising can be done with a briefing note. The Fire Protection initiative of visiting watches to discuss a range of Fire Protection type issues (first phase April – October 2009) will incorporate the new policy changes and can be discussed directly with Operational staff on Station.

Due to the fact that the call challenge is a new concept, Fire Control staff will need the majority of training input. Further work will be undertaken in finalising the call challenge process and Fire Protection will assist directly with both that and the training of Fire control staff in conjunction the Fire control Managers.

A point of contact Officer within Fire Protection will be notified and will assist with any general queries.

No other HR and L and D implications are identified.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The initial equality impact assessment is attached at Appendix A.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

None identified

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The FRA has as a core function under section 7 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, a duty to make provision for the purpose of extinguishing fires in its area and protecting life and property in the event of fires. Such provision to include making arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel.

This affords any fire & rescue service considerable latitude in the arrangements that it makes to discharge this function. The law is clear that there is no duty on the FRS to answer a call for assistance or to take care to do so (Court of Appeal's decision in Capital and Counties Plc v Hampshire CC [1997]). Therefore, the FRA is entitled to adopt this (UFS) policy and there is no risk of claim against the FRA arising from its adoption.

Q1. How does a judgment passed in 1997 apply to legislation enacted in 2004?

A1. These are 2 different issues. The Capital Counties case is about whether the FRA has a duty of care for attending a fire which if its does not could lead to a claim for damages in negligence. That case remains valid and good law in respect of the law of negligence. The 2004 sets out the FRA's statutory duties which are owed to the public as a whole and a breach of any duty does not enable an individual a right to claim damages for the breach of that statutory duty (a different legal concept). In actual fact the duty as set out above to make arrangements allows for the UFS policy which has been adopted.

Q2. The 2004 act states the requirement for 'making arrangements for dealing with calls for help' but the judgment in 1997 found that there is 'no duty on the FRS to answer a call for assistance'?

A2. This means that no duty is owed to an individual in negligence to answer a call for assistance. This is separate to the FRA making arrangements for dealing with calls e.g. having a Control Centre and a process for mobilising appliances.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of this new policy aims to reduce a number of unwanted calls and will further our ability to maintain our response to emergency incidents.

A fully integrated interdepartmental response to the issue of UFS will maintain efficient and effective support systems for delivering the service and allow a more balanced approach between the prevention of incidents and our response to them.

It brings together all of the elements of our Service and demonstrates a fully integrated approach.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The present policies relating to UFS (2011 and 2025) have been in effect since 2002, although they have reduced PDA's to UFS they do little to manage or reduce the volume of calls we receive, It is recommended that these polices are withdrawn and replaced with the proposed new policy.

9.2 Implement the new policy with a commencement date to be agreed. It is suggested that this takes effect no later than the 1st September 2009. This will allow training notes, briefing notes and Fire Control protocols to be finalised.

John Mills
STATION MANAGER

APPENDIX A

Initial Equality Impact Assessment Questionnaire

This questionnaire will enable you to decide whether or not the new or proposed policy or service needs to go through a full Equality Impact Assessment.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="7">Title of policy or service</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Name of Employee completing assessment:
SM MILLS</td><td colspan="3">Department and Section:
FIRE PROTECTION</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">1. State the purpose and aims of the policy or service.
This should identify “(the legitimate) aim” of the policy or service</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">2. Who is responsible for implementing it?
SM MILLS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">3. Who is likely to be disproportionately affected by the proposal? People from which of the equality strands? (please tick)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Age</td><td>Disability</td><td>Family Status</td><td>Gender</td><td>Race</td><td>Sexual Orientation</td><td>Religion or Belief</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">4. If no boxes are ticked – there is no need to continue the EIA</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">5 If 1 or more boxes are ticked, describe how these groups are likely to be affected:

POSSIBLE INCREASE IN TRAVEL TIME FROM CURRENT WORK LOCATION</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">6. Identify the individuals and organisations that are likely to have an interest in, or be affected by the policy or service.
This should identify the persons/organisations who may need to be consulted about the policy or service and its impact.

• SRT
• REPRESENTATIVE BODIES
• PUBLIC
• FIRE AUTHORITY MEMBERS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">7. Has consultation (with managers, employees, TUs etc) on the policy or service been undertaken?</td><td>Yes</td><td colspan="2">No</td></tr>
</table>

8. If yes, set out who has been consulted and any agreements and/or concerns identified:		
9. Has monitoring been undertaken?	Yes	No
10. What does this monitoring show?		
11. If no to Q9, has a monitoring system been established to check for impact on equality strands?	Yes	No
12. Other comments:		

13. Taking into account the information gathered to date, does the policy or service have a different impact on any equality group? Please identify:			
No Impact	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Impact Not Known
14. **If No Impact or Positive Impact box is ticked there is no need to continue the EIA. If Negative Impact or Impact not Known is ticked, please proceed to full assessment.**			

15 Proceed to Full Equality Impact Assessment	Yes	No
16. What are your reasons for your decision?		

1st Authorising signature (Completing Employee/s)

……

Date: ……..

Once completed and authorised, please send copy of this form to the Equality and Diversity Officer.

2nd Authorising Signature (Equality and Diversity Officer)

……

Date: ……..

Version 2.6

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

UNWANTED FIRE SIGNAL REDUCTION POLICY

Policy No: REPLACING 2011 & 2025

Scope:

This policy is mandatory

Summary:

This policy is designed to reduce the impact of unwanted fire signals generated by automatic detection systems on service delivery, business and commerce and improve the safety of the communities of Nottinghamshire by ensuring that our service is more readily available for genuine emergencies.

Version Control:

Person Responsible:/Owner	*Version*	*Date*
John Lee Mills (Originator) / Fire Protection		
Revisions: [reason and version 0.1 small,1.00 large change]	2.5	01/06/09

Review Date:

Contents: **Page**

Section 1 Introduction **2**
Section 2 Key elements of this Policy **3**
Section 3 Unwanted Fire Signal Reduction Strategy **3**
Section 4 Off line Protocol **4**
Section 5 Fire Control Procedure **5**
Section 6 Operational Procedure **7**
Section 7 Enforcement Hierarchy **9**
Section 8 Duties by Role **10**
Section 9 Appendices **12**

Section 1 Introduction

An Unwanted Fire Signal (UFS) is defined as a signal transmitted by an Automatic Fire Detection System (AFD) reporting a fire where upon arrival of the fire service it is found that a fire has not occurred. UFS are entirely avoidable through good system design, management practice, procedure, maintenance and the appropriate use of space within buildings.

The number of AFD systems installed in Nottinghamshire is not known and, as Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service has no direct control of these systems, the Service needs to be pro-active in influencing the management of such systems in order to reduce the adverse impact caused by UFS.

The principal areas of impact on the Service generated by UFS include;

- Diverting essential services from attending other more serious emergencies (performing rescues and saving lives)
- Increased risk of accidents and collisions as a result of the service responding under emergency conditions
- Demoralising to personnel
- Disruption to the programmed activity of NFRS, e.g. fire safety education and fire prevention activities
- Adverse affect on the best value performance indicators
- Significant financial burden. Cost of attendance to tax payers for each UFS can be up to £300 per call

The impact of UFS on the community includes;

- Disruption to business (downtime and time wasted, loss of revenue)
- Loss of credibility in the alarm system which may result in occupant complacency leading to inappropriate response in the event of a real fire
- Cost to business from retained duty system firefighters being released from duty
- Impact on the environment caused by unnecessary appliance movements
- Drain on public finances

Section 2 Key elements of this policy

In order to reduce the impact of UFS generated by fire detection systems on Service delivery, business and commerce and to subsequently improve the safety of the community; Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service will:

- Respond quickly and effectively to those automatic fire alarm calls where a confirmed fire has been detected
- Determine and deploy alternative levels of response to Automatic Fire Detection calls where confirmation of fire has not been received
- Identify the worst UFS offenders and work closely with the responsible person to drive improvements

- Consider the use of statutory powers held within the Fire Safety Order 2005 where efforts to reduce UFS fail to realise improvements
- Employ the Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS) to integrate the reduction of unwanted fire signals into the core activities of fire safety staff, control and station based operational staff

Section 3 Unwanted Fire Signal Reduction Strategy

The strategy for reducing our response to UFS calls is based on the following principles:

- The use of clear protocols for call challenging by Fire Control staff (In most circumstances the caller will be asked to establish the cause of an alarm before Fire Control mobilises any PDA to the premises)

- Liaising with and educating the responsible person taking full responsibility for the alarm system and all fire safety measures in his or her premises as detailed in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

- The adoption of a robust off line policy.

- The recognition that the key purpose of an alarm system is to give the occupiers of a premises warning that there may be a fire so that the occupiers can evacuate the premises or otherwise as directed by the premises Emergency Action Plan

- The adoption of a generic pre-determined attendance (PDA) based on risk assessments and call challenging protocols

- The introduction of protocols to ensure the safety of vulnerable people and high risk buildings

- The provision of appropriate protocols for control staff to support mobilisation decision making process Section 4 Off line Protocol

4.1 Section 4 Off line principle

The "Off-Line" protocol relates to where an automatic fire alarm system is remotely monitored by an ARC via a telephone line connection, i.e. on-line, and when under certain circumstances the alarm system should be temporarily taken off line to prevent avoidable unwanted fire signals being sent to Fire Control.

It is well known that many of the unwanted fire signals that NFRS receive from premises occur during the period 7am to 9pm, typically due to cooking fumes, steam etc. when the premises are actively occupied and the responsible person and staff present could quickly identify the cause of false alarms and prevent unnecessary turn-outs.

About 86% of false alarm calls occur in this period, and although the alarm system is providing early warning of a possible fire situation, it is not a requirement that the fire service is automatically summoned.

The "Off-Line" policy is to encourage premises to come "off-line" during the hours 7am to 9pm, or completely if appropriate, subject to risk assessment.

There will of course be premises where the need to have the fire alarm system on-line for at least certain periods of the day is paramount for safety reasons, but even then there must be attention paid to preventing unwanted fire alarm signals. These premises particularly will be those not subjected to the call challenging procedure (please see section 5).

4.2 Guidance to officers attending a false fire alarm incident

- Consider instructing the responsible person e.g. owner / occupier, to take the fire alarm system off-line if a false alarm has occurred, and use '999' in an emergency, until the problem has been satisfactorily corrected. This is the best advice at the FIRST occurrence of a false alarm, and is especially important when environmental conditions prevail causing false alarms.

- Encourage the responsible person e.g. owner / occupier, to permanently come "off-line" during the hours 7am to 9pm which is the main active part of the day when 86% of false alarms typically occur and the responsible person can use 999 in an emergency or in any doubt. This is to be recommended if the premises are occupied and it is appropriate to do so.

- Encourage the owner / occupier to re- consider why the fire alarm system is on-line anyway and to review their situation and management procedures.

4.3 Owner/ Occupier Role & Responsibilities

Owners / occupiers are responsible for ensuring the reliability of their fire alarm systems, and minimising the possibility of false alarms occurring. They should therefore make arrangements for their fire alarm system to be taken "off line" when the premises are occupied and a responsible person can make a 999 call in an emergency, in the following circumstances when unwanted fire signals can be caused.

The coming "off line" in these circumstances together with informing the Alarm Receiving Centre, forms part of established good practice procedure.

The fire alarm system should be taken "off-line" when the premises are occupied and control measures put in place in the following circumstances:

1. Before any fire alarm test is carried out e.g. routine weekly test

2. Before any work is carried out on a fire alarm system by a fire alarm maintainer, who should be competent and preferably third party accredited.

3. Before workmen are permitted to carry out any work in the vicinity which could activate the fire alarm system, e.g. hot work, creation of sparks, dust, fumes, electrical disturbances etc. Protection of optical smoke detectors to prevent ingress of dust is recommended to avoid subsequent false alarms.

4. If an unwanted fire signal has been produced, e.g. due to a fire alarm system fault, and the cause has not been satisfactorily cleared or the necessary work to rectify the fault has not yet been carried out by the alarm maintainer.

5. When adverse weather conditions locally prevail, e.g. electrical storms.

Note: In an emergency, if the fire alarm system is "off-line", or if in any doubt, the use of 999 should be made to summon the fire service directly. Additionally, when the fire alarm system is normally "on-line", and has been activated in a real emergency, a 999 call is recommended to back up the fire alarm signal in this situation.

5.1 Section 5 Fire Control Procedure.

Fire Control procedure – Call Challenging

In the majority of cases and in order to ascertain whether or not there is a confirmed fire, Fire Control will be required to 'call challenge' the potential unwanted fire signal and mobilise (or not) as appropriate.

However, there will be certain premises that will not be subject to a call challenge, as follows;

5.2 Call challenge – exceptions

Premises with a confirmed sleeping risk

For example;

- domestic premises
- houses in multiple occupancy (HMO)
- residential flats
- sheltered housing
- residential care and nursing homes
- high rise buildings
- hospitals

On receipt of the call, Fire Control will ascertain whether or not there is a potential sleeping risk and once this is confirmed then the relevant attendance will be mobilised.

5.3 Unoccupied premises

Fire Control will ascertain whether the premises is occupied and if this is confirmed, then the relevant attendance will be mobilised.

5.4 Other Potential high risk premises

There are certain premises which are predefined as high risk and are deemed by the service to require a relevant predetermined attendance. As part of the ongoing risk profiling undertaken within the county, these premises will initially be identified by Response and the premises details within the Mobilising system will amended to reflect the require attendance. e.g. Premises with OPS1, Operational tactical plans.

Fire Control will ascertain this information from the MIS and mobilise as required.

5.5 Call Challenge principle

When Control receive a call regarding the actuation of a fire alarm (other than those exceptions detailed above), Fire Control will ask for a competent person to safely check the premises to check that the alarm actuation is due to a fire. It is important that we are clear that we are encouraging them to investigate for signs of fire not locate the fire itself.

The mobilising flowchart (Appendix 1) outlines the procedures for Fire Control when dealing with a possible unwanted fire signal

5.6 Calls from ARC's

On receipt of a the report of a fire signal from an ARC, Fire Control will request that the ARC re-contact the premises to establish the cause of the alarm and confirm if Fire Service attendance is required. If a fire is not confirmed then no attendance will be made and will be recorded as false alarm- unattended.

If the ARC are unable to contact the premises for verification of cause of alarm, the relevant PDA will be mobilised.

5.7 Calls from the occupier/responsible person

On receipt of a call directly from the premises stating the fire alarm has actuated , Fire Control will request that the cause of the alarm be established and confirm if Fire Service attendance is required. If a fire is not confirmed then no attendance will be made and will be recorded as false alarm- unattended.

5.8 Calls from passers-by

On receipt of a call directly from a passer by stating that a fire alarm is actuating and with no other source of information (call from ARC and/ or premises), Fire Control will send the relevant required PDA.

The mobilising flowchart (Appendix A) outlines the procedures for Fire Control when dealing with a possible unwanted fire signal.

Section 6 Operational procedure

The primary responsibility of crews attending any premises where the alarm system has actuated is to establish that the alarm has not actuated as a result of a fire situation.

Whilst crews may need to silence the alarm for their own health and safety; NFRS personnel will **not** reset the alarm system. This policy forms a central element of this procedure; re-setting the alarm system on behalf of the responsible person has the following negative consequences:

- It removes the responsibility from the responsible person to address the problems with the system. For Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue to reduce UFS, it is important that the Responsible Person takes 'ownership' of their fire alarm system
- It renders the Service liable in the event of a future failure of the system during a fire situation
- It hinders the efforts of the alarm engineers to establish the precise nature of a system fault

Note: Alarm systems installed to BS 5839 Part 1 (almost all systems other than domestic units) will continue to provide protection even if the alarm has been silenced. In the event that another detector or a call point is activated, the alarm sounders will re-activate.

Operational personnel will assist the responsible person with the investigation into the cause of the alarm as per the attendance flowchart for Fire crews (Appendix 3). Every effort should be made to ascertain the reason for the activation; this may include talking to persons who were in the area at the time of actuation. Advice can be given on a good will basis only.

A completed unwanted fire signal form carried will be carried on all front line appliances and shall be completed detailing the findings of the investigation and will be provided to the RP.

Once the cause has been established, appropriate advice can be given to the RP aimed at preventing the circumstances that led to the actuation from happening again in the future. The cause of the actuation should be included in the stop message along with the zone and location.

Operational crews should consider instructing the responsible person e.g. owner / occupier, to take the fire alarm system off-line if a false alarm has occurred, and use '999' in an emergency, until the problem has been satisfactorily corrected. This is the best advice at the FIRST occurrence of a false alarm, and is especially important when environmental conditions prevail causing false alarms. Crews should inform Fire Control and the premises need to ensure that staff and/ or their ARC are also made aware.

This ‘off line’ option should not be considered in those premises to which call challenging is not applied.

In circumstances where it is not possible to talk directly to the RP whilst in attendance at the premises, a copy of the completed unwanted fire signal form will be provided to the person liaising with the Fire Service for them to pass to the RP when they are available.

Whilst in attendance at the UFS incident; the point of contact could be any one of the persons listed below;

Responsible Person: The person with control of the building as defined in article 3 of the Fire Safety Order 2005, the RP is required by law under article 17 of the Fire Safety Order 2005 to ensure that the fire alarm system is ‘***subject to a suitable system of maintenance and is maintained in an efficient state, in efficient order and in good repair’.***

Competent Person: The person appointed by the Responsible Person to assist them in the undertaking of the protective and preventative measures – as defined by the Fire Safety Order (article 18) This person will have knowledge of the alarm system and will be empowered to make changes to the system as and when required.

Available Person: Where neither of the above persons are available, any other person who is on site whilst the fire service is in attendance.

This may be a key holder, security guard, receptionist or any other person who is able to assist with the investigation and is able to ensure that the unwanted fire signal form is passed to the RP.

NB. For the purposes of this policy the definition for the Responsible Person has been used in all cases. However, this can be taken to mean any of the above and Crews should always try to deal with the RP if available.

Where the premises are unoccupied and therefore a key holder has been requested, a full external examination of the premises should be carried out for signs of fire. If the key holder fails to attend after a period of 20 minutes, the incident commander, following a dynamic risk assessment, may consider taking no further action and return all appliances to station having sent the appropriate stop message. On return to station a standard letter detailing our key holder policy should be sent to the Responsible Person.

Section 7 Enforcement Hierarchy

In addition to the call challenge and/ or response to an AFD signal there will be arrange of 'enforcement' type protocols that will be applied to all UFS, as follows:

Operational personnel will record investigation findings on the unwanted fire signal form and pass top copy to responsible person. These forms are the first level of enforcement and as such should be completed at every UFS incident except for single domestic dwellings.

Crew, Watch & Point of Contact Officers will monitor the effectiveness of crews actions using CFRMIS.

If the level of UFS remains unacceptably high; The point of contact officer (or person nominated by him) will make arrangements to talk to the responsible person or issue our standard letter which will outline the concerns of NFRS regarding the high levels of UFS at their premises.

Dependant on the type of premises, consideration should be given to placing the premises "offline" for a predetermined period, thereby allowing the premises to resolve any identified problems and reducing the risk of another UWS. Crews should inform Fire Control and the premises need to ensure that staff and/ or their ARC are also made aware.

The Triggers for sending out UFS letters are:

- Two or more unwanted fire signals in any period of four weeks.
- Three or more unwanted fire signals in any period of twenty six weeks
- Larger premises with more complex fire alarm systems will have their performance monitored by the Fire Protection co-ordinator. Any concerns regarding premises such as hospitals should be forwarded to Fire Protection.

Following further UFS from premises; The Point of Contact Officer or Watch Manager will liaise with the responsible person to agree a formal action plan with agreed UFS action targets.

If response of RP is poor or levels of UFS remain unacceptably high; the detail should be referred to the appropriate Fire Protection team for further action. This may include a full audit of the premises to ascertain the management status and possible enforcement action under the FSO.

NB. All activity regarding UFS must be recorded using CFRMIS to provide an auditable trail to support possible future enforcement action.

Section 8 Duties by role

8.1 Fire Control

To receive calls from the public and where appropriate to challenge the call where the only indication of fire is where an alarm is sounding.
Alarm Receiving Centres (Arcs) operators will be asked if they have contacted the premises to establish the cause prior to contacting the fire service.
Where the ARC has failed to contact the premises and that premises is not exempted form this policy (see page 4), they will be informed that no response will be made unless fire is confirmed.

8.2 Fire crews

- Attend alarm sounding incidents and once established that the cause is 'unwanted' to challenge that call and complete an unwanted fire signal form.
- In occupied buildings that are not exempted, it needs to be established why the call was passed to the fire service and why an investigation was not carried out by the occupiers first.

8.3 Point of Contact Officers

- To reduce the occurrence of UFS in the district area in line with the achievable targets in the local risk management plan.
- Ensure that fire crews assist the RP in the investigation and offer appropriate advice.
- Ensure that each UFS is recorded on CFRMIS and to constantly monitor the effect of fire crew's actions and to decide on appropriate further action where a premises fails to respond to efforts to reduce the problem.

8.4 Fire Protection

- Support Point of Contact Officers and operational crews where station based efforts have failed to improve UFS levels and where a solution of a more technical nature may be required to solve the problem.
- Establish premises UFS history and discuss with RP during inspections and other visits.
- Collate UFS data using CFRMIS and the performance team to create quarterly reports that will detail our top 25 offenders in each geographic group North, City & South.
- Create, design and review standard letters for use county wide, these shall be placed on CFRMIS for station administrators to send out when appropriate triggers have been hit.
- Provide consistent enforcement decisions and best advice in respect of new building projects and alterations to existing buildings to ensure that appropriate detection is used in order to prevent possible UFS. UFS advice will be included in all building regulations consultations.

- Prior to inspections; FPO's will interrogate the UFS page of the premises CFRMIS file, any recorded UFS should be noted and discussed with the responsible person during the inspection.
- On all premises visits, FPOs will take the opportunity to discuss the management of the fire alarm system and UFS reduction where appropriate to do so. In multi-occupied premises they will ensure that suitable and sufficient procedures between the occupiers are in place.
- Liaise and maintain partnerships with key stakeholders.
- Generate relevant statistics and data to internal and external stakeholders.

8.5 Responsible Person

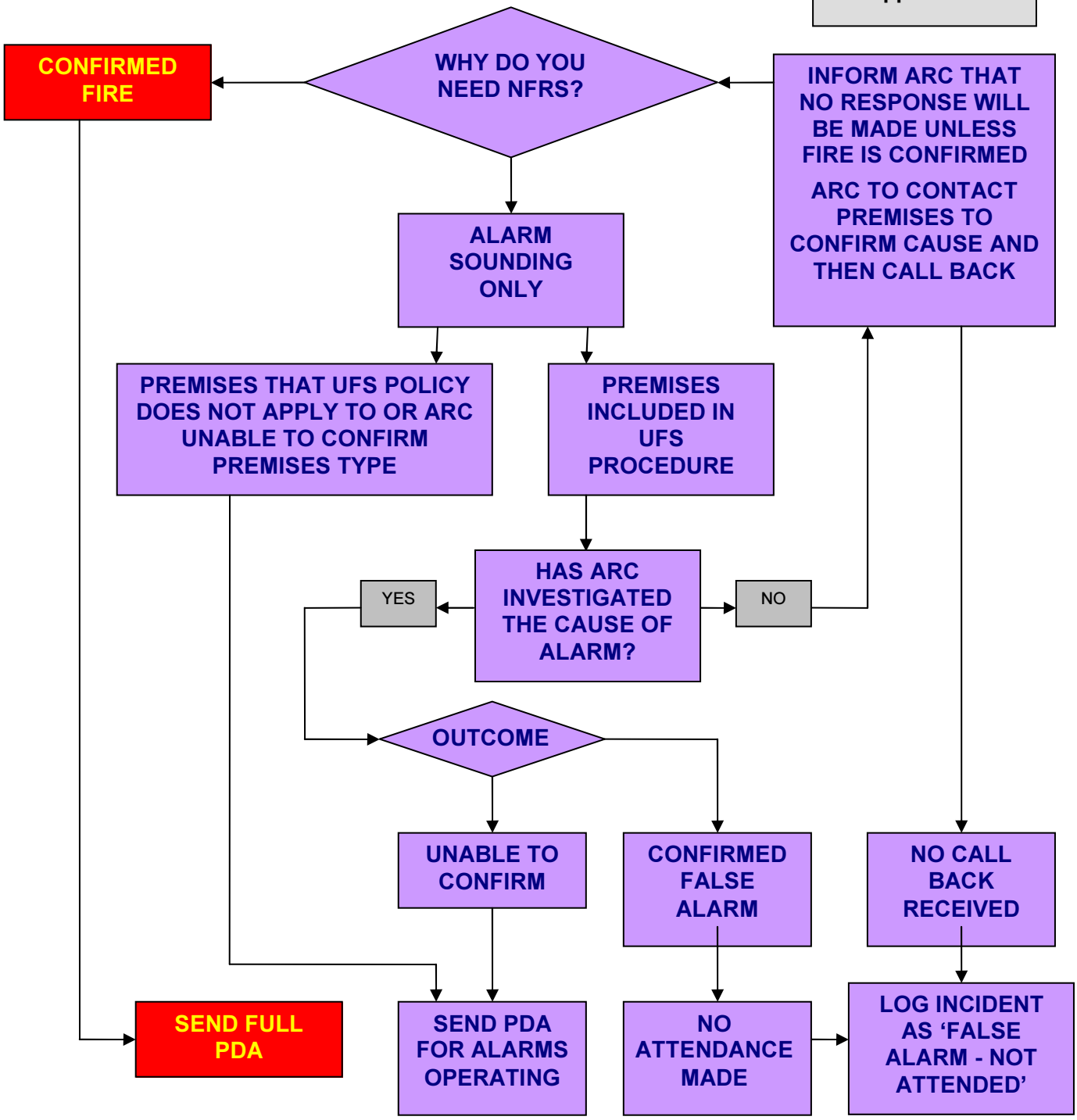
- The RP is the most important person in the chain of care of the fire alarm system, BS 5839 requires that the RP appoints ***'a single named person to supervise all matters pertaining to the alarm system'*** (see procedure for operational personnel). The RP can of course nominate themselves but the principle is that there is someone on the premises who takes ownership of the system, understands its purpose and is responsible for its day to day management.

- Where the system is remotely monitored through an ARC, we will request that the RP, provide at least two key holders within 20 minutes of the premises.

Section 9 Appendices

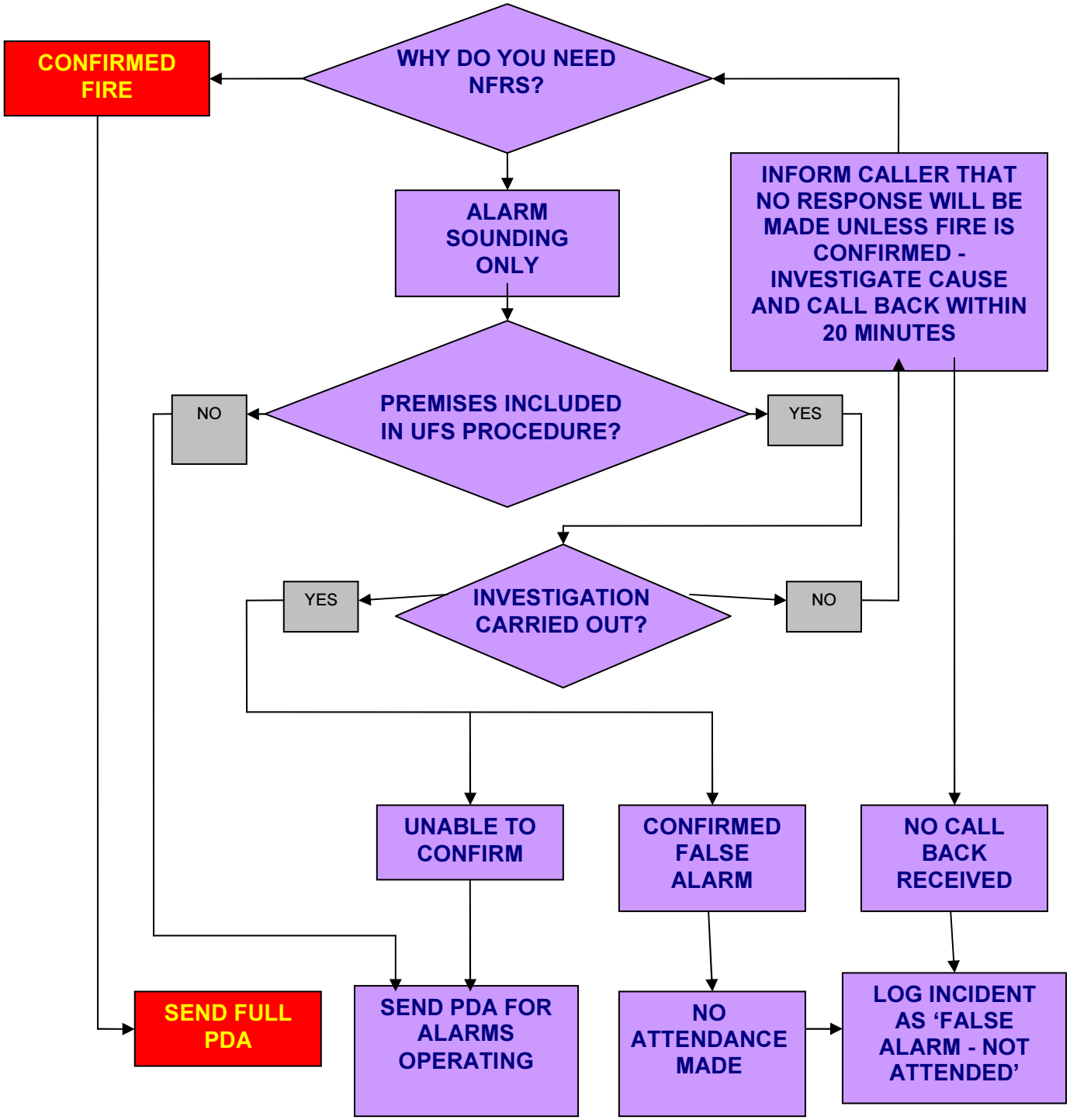
MOBILISING FLOWCHART – CALLS RECEIVED FROM ALARM RECEIVING CENTRE (ARC)

Appendix 1



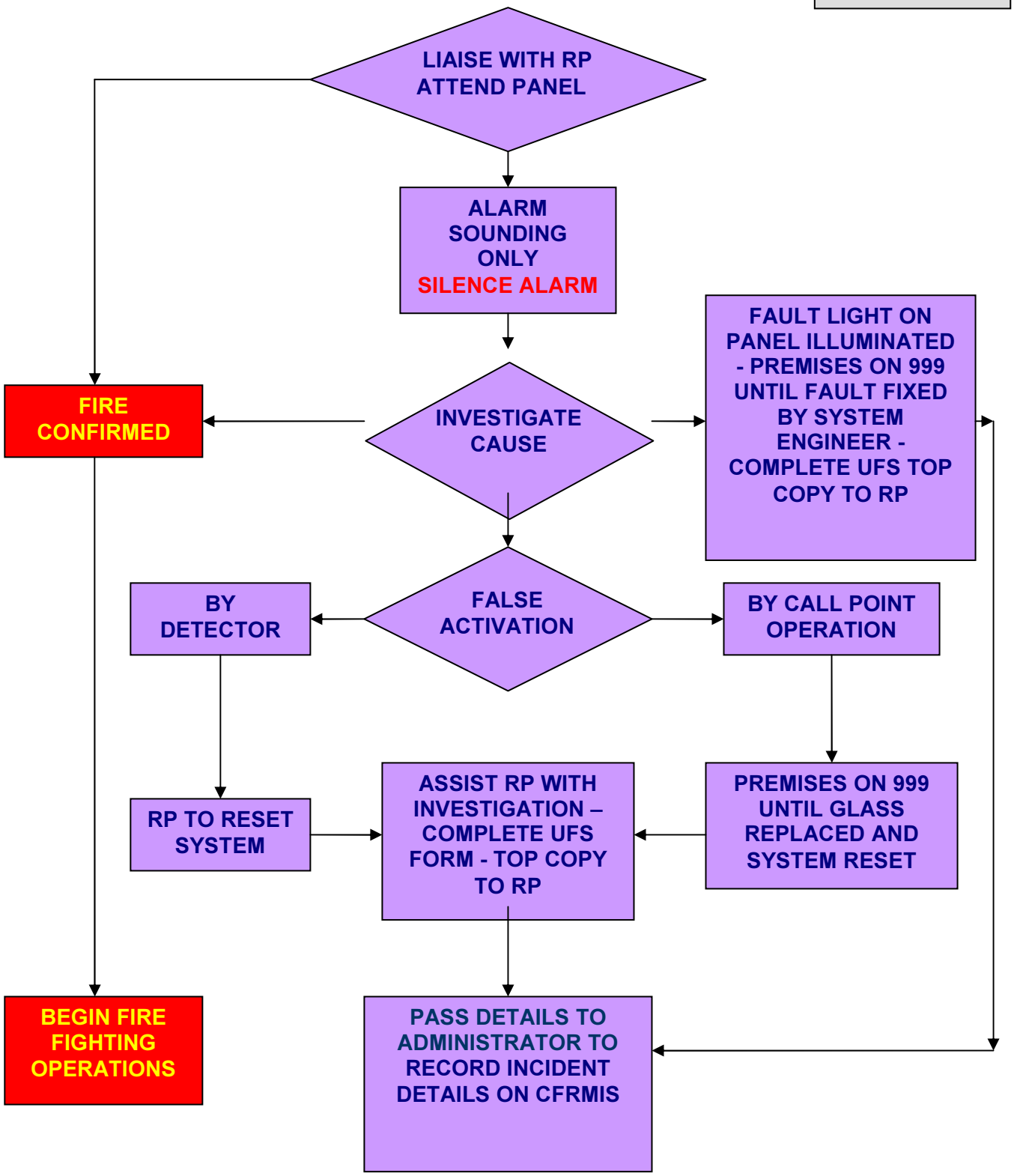
MOBILISING FLOWCHART – CALLS RECEIVED FROM OCCUPIER

Appendix 2



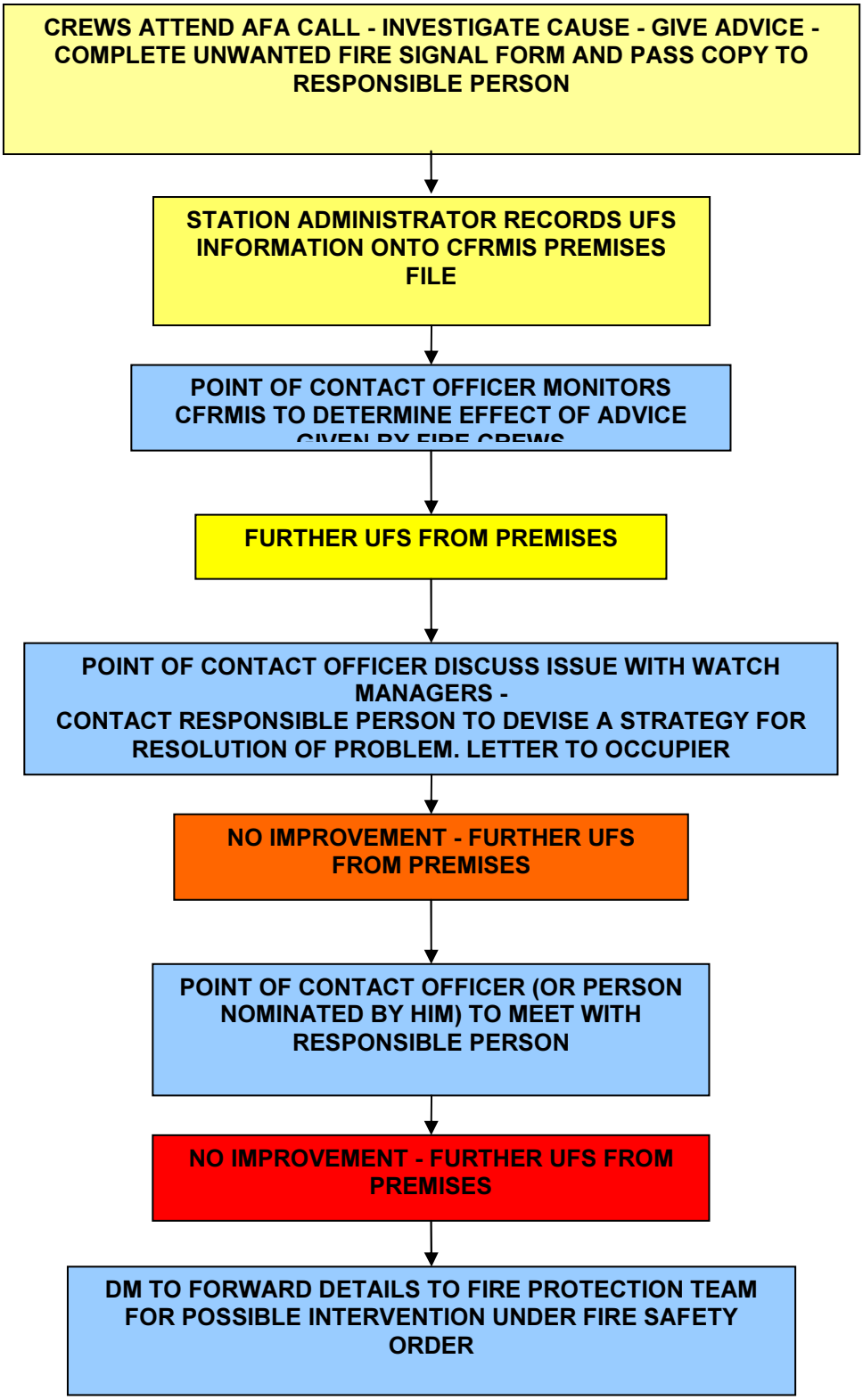
ATTENDANCE FLOWCHART – FIRE CREWS

Appendix 3



UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS

ACTIONS FLOWCHART



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Incident Recording System Proforma

Address

FIRE | SPECIAL SERVICE | FALSE ALARM

Incident number: Date:
Address:

Postcode:
Map ref (if not addressable location):

OTB? If yes, which FRS:
Their incident number:
Type of property involved:
Origin of call:
Type of incident mobilised to:

Resources and Equipment used

FIRE | SPECIAL SERVICE

Address appliance mobilised from if not station:

Postcode:
Map ref (if not addressable location):

Delay in commencing firefighting actions?
Reason:
Type of equipment used:

Number used:
Main action before arrival by public:

Main action by FRS:

Fixed firefighting / venting system...
Type:
Impact of Fire:
Manual systems...
Type:
Impact on Fire:
Active firefighting facilities...
Type:
Location:

Car Fire

FIRE

Compartment fire started in:
Cause of fire:
Size of fire (Sq/M)
On arrival:
On stop:
Registration number:
VIN:
Vehicle reported missing to police?:

Alarm System

FIRE | FALSE ALARM

Type:
Location:
Reason for non function:

Hazardous Materials

FIRE | SPECIAL SERVICE

UN number or name:
Emergency Action Code:
Hazard Identification Number:

False Alarm

FALSE ALARM

Reason for false alarm:

Additional Information

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE FIRE and RESCUE SERVICE
FALSE FIRE ALARM REPORT
FOR THE URGENT ATTENTION OF THE MANAGER

Address of Premises: **Serial No.** 11401

.....

.....

.....

For the Attention of: (Capitals)..... **Date:**.....

(Name of Person Responsible for the Fire Alarm System which operated)

The Fire & Rescue Service has attended the above address in response to a call received from the Automatic Fire Alarm System and, as no fire has been found, the incident will be recorded as a False Fire Alarm call. THE FIRE ALARM SYSTEM HAS / HAS NOT BEEN RESET.

FALSE FIRE ALARM CALLS WASTE VALUABLE FIRE SERVICE RESOURCES, WHEN FIRE-FIGHTERS COULD BE NEEDED AT A REAL EMERGENCY, AND MUST BE DISRUPTIVE AND DISTRESSING TO YOU.

Alarm caused by :- (Tick box and comment below)

Defective alarm system	☐	Dust in detector head	☐
Uninformed fire alarm test	☐	Insects entering detector head	☐
Persons working on system	☐	Actuated by aerosol spray	☐
Persons working in vicinity	☐	System reset before arrival	☐
Cooking fumes	☐	Change in water pressure	☐
Smoking near detector	☐	Power failure / surge	☐
External fumes, steam etc.	☐	Adverse weather conditions	☐

Zone.....**Detector**.....**Location**.....**Time**.....

Comments and Observations (e.g. Staff using cooking appliance)

.....

Name and rank of attending Fire Officer .....**Station** .....

Guidance on action to be taken by Person Responsible for the Fire Alarm System

The False Fire Alarm Report is to help and advise you in reducing False Fire Alarm calls to the Fire & Rescue Service, and your co-operation is requested. Please take the following actions:

1. It is your responsibility to have the alarm system reset by a qualified person as a matter of urgency. **It is not intended to encourage you to compromise safety**, but you should contact your Alarm Receiving Centre, and should use the telephone and dial '999' to summon the Fire & Rescue Service in an emergency until your system has been corrected and restored to operate reliably.

2. You should take steps to investigate the cause of the alarm, which has been identified on the report, and if bad practices have accidentally activated the alarm system, they should be improved immediately. If the alarm system is suspected to be faulty, you should contact your fire alarm maintenance engineer and arrange for the system to be examined and any necessary work carried out

3. The aim of the Fire & Rescue Service is to encourage the Person Responsible / Occupier to make sure their fire alarm system is reliable with regular maintenance, and where local common practices are the cause of false alarms, to make changes to prevent similar false alarm calls from occurring again.

4. If you require further advice, do not hesitate to contact the Fire & Rescue Service.

1.0 Definition

The “Off-Line” policy relates to where an automatic fire alarm system is remotely monitored by an Alarm Receiving Centre via a telephone line connection, i.e. on-line, and when under certain circumstances the alarm system should be temporarily taken off line to prevent avoidable unwanted fire signals being sent to Fire Control.

2.0 General Principles

It is well known that many of the unwanted fire signals that we receive from premises occur during the period 7am to 9pm, typically due to cooking fumes, steam etc. when the premises are actively occupied and the responsible person and staff present could quickly identify the cause of false alarms and prevent unnecessary turn-outs.

About 86% of false alarm calls occur in this period, and although the alarm system is providing early warning of a possible fire situation, it is not a requirement that the fire service is automatically summoned.

The “Off-Line” policy is to encourage such premises to come “off-line” during the hours 7am to 9pm, or completely if appropriate, subject to risk assessment.

The existing brigade policy of recommending premises, in particular residential care, to be “on-line”, has been in place for many years, and is peculiar to this county. It is now considered to be unnecessary in many cases for this situation to continue. The benefits are not entirely the reduction of unwanted fire alarm signals, since the occupiers need to take greater ownership of the fire alarm systems and the consequences of local procedures.

There will of course be premises where the need to have the fire alarm system on-line for at least certain periods of the day is paramount for safety reasons, but even then there must be attention paid to preventing unwanted fire alarm signals.

3.0 Application – Guidance to officers attending a false fire alarm incident

1. Instruct the responsible person e.g. owner / occupier, to take the fire alarm system off-line if a false alarm has occurred, and use ‘999’ in an emergency, until the problem has been satisfactorily corrected. This is the best advice at the FIRST occurrence of a false alarm, and is especially important when environmental conditions prevail causing false alarms.

2. Encourage the responsible person e.g. owner / occupier, to come “off-line” during the hours 7am to 9pm which is the main active part of the day when 86% of false alarms typically occur and the responsible person can use 999 in an emergency or in any doubt. This is to be recommended if the premises are occupied and it is appropriate to do so.

3. Encourage the owner / occupier to re- consider why the fire alarm system is on-line anyway and to review their situation and management procedures.

4.0 Role & Responsibilities

Owners / occupiers are responsible for ensuring the reliability of their fire alarm systems, and minimising the possibility of false alarms occurring. They should therefore make arrangements for their fire alarm system to be taken "off line" when the premises are occupied and a responsible person can make a 999 call in an emergency, in the following circumstances when unwanted fire signals can be caused.

The coming "off line" in these circumstances together with informing the Alarm Receiving Centre, forms part of established good practice procedure.

The fire alarm system should be taken "off-line" when the premises are occupied and control measures put in place in the following circumstances:

6. Before any fire alarm test is carried out e.g. routine weekly test

7. Before any work is carried out on a fire alarm system by a fire alarm maintainer, who should be competent and preferably third party accredited.

8. Before workmen are permitted to carry out any work in the vicinity which could activate the fire alarm system, e.g. hot work, creation of sparks, dust, fumes, electrical disturbances etc. Protection of optical smoke detectors to prevent ingress of dust is recommended to avoid subsequent false alarms.

9. If an unwanted fire signal has been produced, e.g. due to a fire alarm system fault, and the cause has not been satisfactorily cleared or the necessary work to rectify the fault has not yet been carried out by the alarm maintainer.

10. When adverse weather conditions locally prevail, e.g. electrical storms.

Note: In an emergency, if the fire alarm system is "off-line", or if in any doubt, the use of 999 should be made to summon the fire service directly.
Additionally, when the fire alarm system is normally "on-line", and has been activated in a real emergency, a 999 call is recommended to back up the fire alarm signal in this situation.

5.0 Monitoring - Audit & Review

The reduction of unwanted fire signals from remotely monitored premises known to have a history of false alarms, is indicated by monthly analysis of the MIS stats logs. The reporting of any problems encountered by the premises owners / occupiers in adopting the Off-Line policy is encouraged from the outset.