

**Working together  
for a safer Scotland**



**SCOTTISH  
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

Working together for a safer Scotland

## **Time for Change -**

### **Reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals**

***Our response to fire alarms in commercial business  
and workplace premises is changing***

**Safety. Teamwork. Respect. Innovation.**

## **1. Background**

Every year we attend around 28,000 automatic fire alarm (AFA) call outs to commercial business and workplace premises each year.

AFA systems provide an early warning of fire and are one of the most effective ways to keep businesses, staff and customers safe in the event of a fire.

Unfortunately, most signals from these systems are not actual fires – they are false alarms often caused by cooking fumes, dust or a lack of maintenance. These unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) mean fire crews are called out unnecessarily.

## **2. New Response Model**

From 1 July 2023, we will stop attending AFA call outs to commercial business and workplace premises, such as factories, offices, shops and leisure facilities unless a fire has been confirmed.

Our control room operators will now be asking anyone who reports a fire alarm to check whether there is an actual fire or signs of fire, before sending the nearest fire appliance.

This change does not apply to sleeping premises, such as hospitals, care homes, hotels or domestic dwellings who will receive a full pre-determined attendance (PDA).

A full emergency response will be mobilised to any confirmed fires while this change will not affect how we respond to alarms from private homes, only to false alarms in workplaces that have fire safety responsibilities under the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

This change follows the [SFRS public consultation](#) in 2021.

## 2.1 Benefits

Reducing attendances to unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) means;

- Our firefighters are available to deal with real emergencies and are less likely to be committed to false alarms.
- We can spend more time training and developing our firefighters in more technical areas.
- We can spend more time working with duty holders on measures to prevent AFAs occurring in the first place and to minimise the disruption to businesses.
- We can improve the work/life balance of our on-call staff. Each time they respond to an AFA, their primary employer releases them to attend an incident that is often an UFAS.
- We can stop all unnecessary blue light journeys to significantly reduce road risk to firefighters, road users and pedestrians.
- We can minimise the negative impact upon the environment from our fleet.
- Businesses and services do not have to wait unnecessarily for our attendance to confirm there is no fire and to allow them to resume business operations.

## 3. Responsibilities

The SFRS has no legal responsibility to respond to AFAs activating in the workplace.

The responsibility to investigate AFAs rests with those with fire safety responsibilities for the premises, the duty holder, as detailed in Part 3 of both the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Fire Safety (Scotland) Regulations 2006.

## 4. Dutyholder Actions

To prepare themselves for the change in how SFRS will respond to workplace AFAs dutyholder should;

- Identify relevant premises for which they are responsible.
- Review fire risk assessments (FRA) for these premises.
- Review fire safety management arrangements, including staff training, to reflect the outcomes of the review of the FRA.
- If the premises alarm system is connected to an alarm receiving centre (ARC), the dutyholder should liaise with that ARC to ensure the use of, and contact numbers for, the premises held on their systems are accurate and up-to-date.
- Ensure staff and relevant persons do not rely upon an alarm system to alert the SFRS to any fire event. Always call 999 in the event of a fire, even if the alarm is sounding.
- Ensure appropriate strategies are in place to prevent false alarms from happening.

## **5. SFRS Support**

Dutyholders can contact locally based personnel for advice on how they can best prepare themselves and their staff for the change in response model.

A dedicated [UFAS webpage](#) has been created to provide advice and guidance to dutyholders, including how they can reduce UFAS.

Further queries can be directed to the email address;  
[SFRS.EnforcementCentre@firescotland.gov.uk](mailto:SFRS.EnforcementCentre@firescotland.gov.uk)