



City of St. Louis
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

False Alarm Ordinance Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the purpose of the City of St. Louis' newly revised Alarm Permit and False Alarm Management Ordinance (the "Ordinance") and why is it being instituted?

The purpose of the Ordinance is to reduce false alarms while maintaining direct police response to alarm soundings.

Last year alone, the St. Louis Police Department responded to over 60,000 burglar alarms, the vast majority of which were false. In addition to the significant drain on the police department's resources, false alarms jeopardize public safety by slowing the police's ability to respond as quickly to real emergencies.

2. What is a false alarm?

A false alarm is when a burglary or robbery alarm sounds and the police are called to respond arrive only to find that neither of these crimes has occurred nor is there evidence that they have. Alarms are considered false when a person, a domestic animal, a heating or air conditioning blower, falling rock, hanging signs, or a malfunction in the alarm system accidentally activates them. A call cancelled by the alarm or monitoring company before police arrive on the scene will not be counted as a false alarm.

3. Aren't the police required by law to respond to alarm soundings?

No. Owning an alarm system is a choice, not a right. Less than one-third of the city's population owns an alarm system. The general public should not have their safety endangered because police are responding to false alarms. The new alarm ordinance will help discourage false alarms.

3. What some of the important requirements of the new Ordinance?

All alarm companies doing business in the City must be licensed with the City of St. Louis and the Department of Public Safety. All alarm agents (salespeople, installers) must have a photo ID that they must show you on request. You are

entitled to a written estimate before any work is done to install or modify and alarm system. Alarm companies are required to provide you with information on the Ordinance, a brochure on your rights and responsibilities as an alarm user, and to train use of alarm systems use and the prevention of false alarms. The alarm company also needs your signature on a form (provided by the Department of Public Safety) certifying that they have done these things for you.

Alarm companies (or you if you do not have an alarm company who monitors or services your alarm system) must register your alarm system with the City's Department of Public Safety and pay the first year's registration fee before anyone is permitted to report an alarm sounding to the Police Department. You and your alarm company will be given a permit number by the Department of Public Safety.

4. What if I have a non-monitored alarm?

All alarm systems, whether monitored or not, must be registered with the Department of Public Safety and the annual registration fee is owed.

5. How much are the annual registration fees?

Registration fees are \$25 per year for a residential alarm system and \$50 per year for a commercial alarm system.

6. Will there be fines associated with false alarms?

Yes. The first false alarm within the twelve month period from the date the alarm is registered is free. There will be a \$25 fine for the second false alarm, \$50 for the third, \$50 plus a 30-day suspension of police response for the fourth false alarm, \$100 for the fifth, \$100 for the sixth, \$100 for the seventh, and \$100 and a one-year suspension of police response for the eighth false alarm within a twelve-month period. At the end of every twelve-month period (or the one-year suspension), a subscriber's number of false alarms will be reset to zero.

7. What will the money generated by the Ordinance be used for?

The fees will allow St. Louis' Department of Public Safety to set up an alarm tracking system to hold alarm owners accountable for false alarms. In addition, the fees will allow police to continue to be the *first* to respond to alarms. In many cities where new alarm ordinances have gone into effect, police no longer respond to alarm soundings, only to alarms that have been verified by a third party (e.g. security guard dispatched by the alarm company).

8. Who determines if an alarm sounding is a false alarm?

The police officer who responds to the alarm.

9. Have other cities instituted similar ordinances?

Yes. Most major cities (and many smaller towns and counties) across the US have either passed or are considering passage of legislation to reduce false alarms.

10. When does the new ordinance become effective?

The ordinance was passed by the St. Louis Board of Aldermen in 2004 and will be implemented effective June 1, 2005. Permits are required to be in place and the first year's registration fee must have been paid for all existing alarm systems by this date to insure ongoing police response.

11. How do I obtain a copy of the ordinance?

The St. Louis Public Library has converted St. Louis City Ordinances to electronic format. To retrieve the document, go to the following link: www.slpl.lib.mo.us/cco/ords/data/ord6264.htm.

12. How can I prevent false alarms?

Insure that you are working with a reputable licensed alarm company. (You can go to the City's website at www.stlouis.missouri.org/government to see a list of all alarm companies licensed to do business in the City.) Also, it is your responsibility make sure that you, and any one else you authorize to use your system (children, maid, nanny, grandparents, neighbors etc.), are properly trained in the use of the system and the prevention of false alarms. You must also maintain (or have maintained) the premises in which the alarm system is installed, and the alarm system itself, in a manner that insures proper operation of the system minimizes false alarms. You should immediately report any problems with your alarm system to your alarm company.

13. Can I appeal a false alarm fine?

Yes. Any appeals must be made in writing to:

City of St. Louis
Alarm Registration and False Alarm Management
P.O. Box 4664
St. Louis, MO 63108