



**Service Policy Note**

**No. FS-PO-016**

**Unwanted Fire Signal (UwFS) Cost Recovery**

**Document Overview**

The following areas are covered by this document:

- Introduction;
- Definitions;
- Impact;
- Application of Cost Recovery
- Audit, Monitoring & Quality Assurance;
- Further Reading.

**Document Control**

Version	Date	Author	Reasons for Change
001	25/05/2018	GM C. Ducat	New Document

**Sign-Off List**

Position
Fire Safety - GM
DCFO – Service Delivery
Other:

**Approved By (to be completed by author)**

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SMG		
CCT		
SLT	✓	
Other		
Comment		

**Equalities Impact Assessment**

Completed (✓)

**Risk Assessment**

Completed (✓)

FOI Exemption Required?	Yes	No	Reason
		✓	

<b>Security Level</b>	Unclassified.
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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This policy is designed to reduce the impact of 'False Alarm' calls generated from automatic fire detection systems.
- 1.2 This policy will outline the rationale for implementing a cost recovery process and detail the criteria as to which premises are identified for cost recovery and how this can be applied.
- 1.3 Northumberland Fire Rescue Service (NFRS) categorise calls to a fire, where on attendance, there is found to be no fire as 'False Alarms'. These calls include calls from individuals which may be genuine but turned out to be incorrect, ( these are recorded as a false alarm - good Intent) or malicious ( recorded as false alarm - malicious). There is a third category of false alarm calls, those that result from automatic fire alarm systems from both non-domestic and domestic premises (recorded as Unwanted Fire signals (UwFS')). In 2016 - 17 NFRS received a total of 772 AFA calls, 376 of which were to non-domestic premises
- 1.4 NFRS recognises the value of fire detection in protecting people from fire and reducing the numbers of fire deaths and injuries. NFRS objective's through this cost recovery process is to encourage proper use and management of these systems. To ensure that those responsible have a suitable system with appropriate management processes in place and reduce the number of false alarms caused by these systems. Additionally where there is a persistent concern with automatic Fire detection systems generating false alarms and where it is appropriate to do so, ensure that filtering is applied to prevent unnecessary calls being made to NFRS.
- 1.5 Fire alarms which actuate when there is no fire can be an indication of poor fire safety management in the premises, those false alarms that result in an attendance by NFRS have a significant impact on the use of operational resources.
- 1.6 A considerable amount of work has been carried out in relation to UwFS previously and a downward trend in NFRS attendance to these incidents can be seen.
- 1.7 The inclusion of suitable automatic fire detection in certain circumstances within the Building Regulations and the requirements imposed on certain types of premises under fire safety legislation means that the potential for false alarms will continue to increase year on year. Therefore, there must be a robust procedure in place to ensure that sites giving rise to persistent UwFS (false alarms) are identified and remedial action taken if NFRS are to continue driving down the number of UwFS received each year.

## **2.0 POWER TO INTRODUCE COST RECOVERY**

- 2.1 The legal basis for charging comes from the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRSA) as amended by the Localism Act 2011.
- 2.2 The Authority has no legal power to make a profit from any charges. Section 18A (5) of the FRSA says "*In setting the amount of the charge .... a FRA must secure that, taking one financial year with another, the authority's income from charges does not*

*exceed the cost to the authority of taking the action for which the charges are imposed.”*

2.3 The Localism Act has also amended the FRSA by introducing a new power, which allows the Authority to charge for attendance at unwanted fire signals due to an automatic fire alarm (AFA).

2.4 Section 18C of the FRSA 2004 states

**Cases where a charge may be made for responding to report of fire etc**

- (1) This section applies for the purposes of section 18B(3).
- (2) This section applies to a report of fire, or explosion, at sea or under the sea.
- (3) This section applies to a report of fire if—
  - (a) the report is of fire at premises that are **not domestic** premises,
  - (b) the **report is false**,
  - (c) **the report is made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment having malfunctioned or been misinstalled**, and
  - (d) there is a **persistent problem with false reports** of fire at the premises that are made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment under common control having malfunctioned or been misinstalled.
- (4) The references in subsection (2) to “sea” are not restricted to the territorial sea of the United Kingdom.
- (5) In subsection (3)—

“ domestic premises ” means premises occupied as a private dwelling (including any garden, yard, garage, outhouse or other appurtenance of such premises which is not used in common by the occupants of more than one such dwelling);

“ warning equipment ” means equipment installed for the purpose of—

  - (a) detecting fire, or
  - (b) raising the alarm, or enabling the alarm to be raised, in the event of fire.

(FRSA 2004)

### 3.0 **IMPACT**

3.1 The purpose of applying a cost recovery process in relation to attending persistent false alarms at a premises is to stimulate an improvement in the local management of automatic fire alarm systems. This is expected to have the following impact:

- An improvement in local alarm management practices
- An increase in the general standard of fire safety at the premises
- An improvement in the local response to potential emergency situations
- A reduction in the unnecessary burden on NFRS resources
- An increase in the availability of appliances and staff for real emergencies and training
- A better value Fire and Rescue Service provision to the people of Northumberland

3.2 Incidents that are found to be to be false alarms have a major impact on Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and cause concern for the following reasons:

- They divert essential service resources rendering them unavailable, with the possibility of delayed attendance at genuine emergencies.
- 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 community fire safety activity, arson reduction and training.
- They have a demoralising effect on personnel attending a high number of false alarms.
- They impose an additional financial burden on the Service, particularly salary and vehicle fleet costs.
- They adversely impact upon the employers who release retained staff for operational duties.

### 4.0 **Calculation of costs**

4.1 Costs for attendance of NFRS appliance shave calculated using the National Fire Chief's Council's guide on cost recovery. (46-2017 NFCC Mutual Assistance Recharge Protocol).

4.2 The costs have been calculated using a crewing model of 1 x Watch Manager (WM) (B) and 4 x Competent Fire fighters (FF). A cost for Retained Duty Personnel turnout fee, the appliance and a 5% administration levy, has also been accounted for in the calculation.

4.3 Breakdown of cost recovery sum

1 x WM (B)	£18.58
4 x FF (£14.89 per FF)	£59.56
RDS turnout fee (£3.94 per person)	£19.70
Fire Appliance	<u>£100.00</u>
	<u>£198.84</u>
5 % administration levy	<u>£9.89</u>
<b>Total Cost recovery Sum</b>	<b><u>£207.73 + VAT</u></b>

## 5.0 Application of Cost Recovery

5.1 Cost recovery will be applied to all Non-Domestic premises where the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) applies.

5.2 Non-domestic premises are:

- all workplaces and commercial premises
- all premises the public have access to
- the common areas of multi-occupied residential buildings

5.3 Cost recovery will be applied to premises where, on the fourth and subsequent UwFS generated over a rolling 12 month period. Full details of the Cost recovery Process can be found in Service Order FS-PR-025 UwFS Cost Recovery.

5.4 The following alarm actuation causes will not generate an application of the cost recovery process.

- False alarm incident resulting from the testing of the system
- False alarm incidents resulting from the activation of a break-glass call point

5.5 All invoices will be raised within 15 working days of the date of the cost recovery qualifying UwFS incident.

5.6 The invoice will be issued to the responsible person as defined under the RRO. If this person is not readily identified, the invoice may be raised against the owner/operator of the fire alarm system.

5.7 UwFS incidents will be attributed to a postcode. The postcode may (or may not) consist of multiple premises. For the purposes of cost recovery, UwFS's will be effectively assigned to a site. A site may consist of one (or more when specifically identified) postcodes. A single postcode will only be recognised as more than one site when the UwFS incident address recorded indicates that the address is unrelated to

another address for the same postcode or where we have identified that there is a genuine reason to acknowledge and record a postcode as consisting of more than one site. **To be recognised as a different site, it is necessary that the other buildings under that postcode do not share a common alarm system or a linked alarm system or shared fire alarm management practices.** Where there is a question over which address is responsible for the UwFS appropriate investigation will be carried out by NFRS in conjunction with responsible persons from that site.

- 5.8 To ensure that invoices are correctly issued, separate sites under one postcode must be discernible through the incident address record and crews must therefore record the location of the incident and not necessarily the address they were mobilised to.
- 5.9 The Group Manager Fire Safety will be responsible for scrutinising any UwFS's that result in an activation of NFRS cost recovery process.

## **6.0 Audit, Monitoring & Quality Assurance**

- 6.1 The Fire Safety Department will perform an internal organisational audit of this policy and related procedures/guidance every three years or if a change in circumstances occurs.
- 6.2 Any recommendations resulting from policy audits will be incorporated into the existing policy and related procedures/guidance.

## **7.0 FURTHER READING**

- CFOA Policy: Model Agreement between Fire and Rescue Authorities on Unwanted Fire Signals and Users of Remotely Monitored Fire Alarm Systems.
- CFOA Codes of Practice: Best Practice for Summoning a Fire Response via Fire Alarm Receiving Organisations.
- CFOA Protocol for the Reduction of False Alarms and Unwanted Fire Signals.
- Fire Safety Procedure Notes FS/PR/002, FS/PR/005.
- Northumberland County Council Fire and Rescue Plan 2014 – 2017.
- Regulatory reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- Localism Act 2011.

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