

## **TRI-SERVICE PROCEDURE**

### **UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS**

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## 1 Introduction

1.1 This procedure aims to reduce the impact of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS's) and false alarms generated from automatic fire detection (AFD) systems within Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.

1.2 The number of AFD systems installed across the three Service areas Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire is not known. As the respective services have no control of these systems, there needs to be a pro-active approach, common across all three Services, to influence the management of such systems, with the aim of reducing the adverse impact caused by UFAS's.

1.3 The definition of a false alarm is 'a fire signal resulting from a cause other than fire', in which a fire alarm system has responded, as designed (or as the technology can be reasonably expected to respond) to any of the following:-

- A fire like phenomenon or environmental influence (e.g., smoke from a nearby bonfire, dust or insects, processes that produce smoke or flame or environmental effects that can render certain types of detector unstable, such as rapid air flow).
- Accidental damage.
- Inappropriate human action (e.g. operation of a system for test or maintenance purposes without prior warning to building occupants and/or a Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisation or malicious actuation of call points), and;
- Equipment false alarms, in which the fire alarm has resulted from a fault in the system. (BS 5839-1: 2017 clause 3.19).

1.4 A false alarm becomes a UFAS at the point the Fire and Rescue Service is requested to attend. They are avoidable through good system design, management practice, procedure, maintenance and the appropriate use of space within the premises.

## 2 Responsibilities

2.1 The Responsible Person (RP), as defined by Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO), has responsibility for the alarm system and for all fire safety measures in the premises.

2.2 All parties involved in the specification, design, installation, commissioning management and maintenance of Automatic Fire Alarm systems have their responsibilities outlined in British Standard 5839 – 1; 2013.

2.3 Operational personnel will assist the RP with the investigation and every effort should be made to identify the cause. This may include talking to persons who were in the area at the time.

2.4 Individual Fire and Rescue Services will make their own arrangements for logging, recording and following up premises.

## 3 Call challenge

3.1 To reduce the impact of UFAS's, the procedure for handling calls where fire alarms are sounding differs from the standard request for assistance.

3.2 On receipt of a call stating that fire alarms are sounding, Control will call challenge to identify the premises and determine if an attendance will be made.

3.3 Call challenge will operate in all three services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

3.4 Calls from premises which are classed as 'exempt' will not be challenged.

The following premises types will be exempt;

- 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 are subject to Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) National PORIS Level 3, 4 and 5.
- 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.

**Unoccupied Buildings will NOT be exempt. This will be trialled in Nottinghamshire FRS and Derbyshire FRS and then reviewed.**

#### **4 Fire Control procedure**

4.1 On receipt of a call, Control will ascertain if the premises is exempt or not. If exempt, mobilise the relevant attendance.

4.2 Calls from Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) –

On receipt of a call from an ARC, Control operators will ask if they have contacted the premises. If not, they will be asked to contact the premises to determine the cause or request that the occupier carries out an investigation, confirming the outcome with Control. The call will be deferred for 20 minutes.

4.3 If the ARC has tried to make contact with no success, Control will request that the ARC contacts a key holder. Control will advise that no response will be made unless a call is received from the premises confirming a fire. The call will be deferred for 20 minutes.

4.4 If the ARC refuses, Control will advise them that no response will be made unless a call is received from the premises confirming a fire.

4.5 Calls from Occupiers –

Control operators should ask the following questions:-

##### **Q.1- Is there a confirmed fire?**

YES – mobilise PDA for the premises type and/or risk.

NO or don't know – go to Question 2.

##### **Q.2 - Has an investigation been carried out?**

YES – go to Question 3.

NO – go to Question 4.

##### **Q.3 - Can you confirm this is a false alarm?**

YES – no mobilisation.

NO – go to question 4.

#### **Q.4 - Are you able to investigate the cause of the alarm?**

YES – investigate cause and call back if we are required to attend.

NO, or unwilling to investigate – Control operator should determine the reasons and explain our non-attendance deferring call for 20 mins.

#### **4.6 Calls from members of the public -**

Alarm sounding and/or fire seen - mobilise PDA for the premises type and/or risk.

Alarm sounding but no external signs of fire – mobilise one appliance.

**Under no circumstances should members of the public investigate or enter a premises.**

#### **4.7 Decision Flexibility**

In order to ensure that the most appropriate response is made, Control have the authority to assess each fire alarm signal and decide if a response should be made, or not. Each fire alarm signal is different and should be assessed to decide if an attendance is required or not. 4.8 suggests information that may be pertinent if deciding to mobilise to a non-exempt premises.

#### **4.8 Strong indicators of fire**

The following are strong indicators of fire and suggest that a false alarm is less likely.

- Activation of a suppression system
- More than one detector activating
- Detectors in multiple zones activating
- Activation of a multi-detector
- No history of false alarms

The exempt list does not prevent Fire Control from further questioning occupiers to collect useful information. Fire Control Operators may elect to ask similar questions to those in 4.5.

#### **4.9 Hospitals -**

Main Hospitals

For a confirmed fire, mobilise full PDA.

Report of AFA actuation – mobilise one appliance to check and ask if they are investigating the cause.

- YES – advise that an appliance has been mobilised. Request the site calls back to confirm if the cause is a false alarm. On receipt of confirmation, Control will stand the appliance down.
- NO – request that the person investigates, but advise that an appliance is on route.

If confirmation that the call is a false alarm is received, Control operator should take the name and position of the person, then stand the appliance down.

If the caller states that the cause is unknown, Control operator will inform the crew attending but the appliance will proceed to check.

#### 4.10 Unoccupied or vacant buildings

If a call is received from an ARC, and the Control operator is told the building is unoccupied, the ARC will be asked to mobilise a keyholder. No attendance will be made as per 4.3 above.

If the call is received from a member of the public, the Control operator will follow procedures as per paragraph 4.6 above.

#### 4.11 Derelict buildings

Building classed as void or derelict and will not form part of this procedure and mobilising will be based on locally held SSRI.

#### 4.12 Heritage buildings

Mobilising to buildings that have site specific risk information will be as per the plans and not call challenged. This typically includes premises classed as Grade I or Grade II\* by Historic England.

Many heritage buildings that are listed are in private ownership so an attendance will be made in most cases.

### 5 Levels of attendance

5.1 As the mobilising system is common across all three Services, the basic levels of attendance have been agreed as follows:-

5.2 Confirmed fire – Pre-determined attendance for the premises which will proceed on emergency response (blue lights).

5.3 AFA – one appliance to attend which will proceed on emergency response.

5.4 AFA with cause confirmed by follow up call – appliance will be either stood down or proceed to check at normal road speed.

5.5 AFA confirmed false alarm at initial call – no attendance by FRS.

5.6 The only variations will be those that are in place through site specific risk information.

## 6 Operational Personnel procedure

6.1 The primary responsibility of Operational personnel 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.

If the Key holder or RP is not present then crews should check the building with a thermal image camera looking for signs of fire as thorough as possible. Crews should remain in attendance for at least 20 mins before leaving the premises.

6.2 If the key holder or RP is present, the Incident Commander (IC) should make their way with them to the alarm panel and determine the details of the actuation.

6.3 If the premises have been fully evacuated, the alarm can be silenced. This should be done by the RP, although it is recognised that alarms may need to be silenced by personnel in order to protect hearing.

6.4 The IC should go to the area of actuation with the RP to investigate. If confirmed as a false alarm, the panel may be reset by the RP.

**Under no circumstances will Operational personnel reset the fire alarm panel.**

6.5 Resetting the alarm on behalf of the RP may result in the following negative impacts:-

- It removes responsibility from the RP to address any problems with the system. In order to effectively reduce UFASs', it is important that the RP takes ownership of the system.
- It may render the Service liable in the event of a future failure of the system during a fire situation, and;
- It may hinder engineers establish the exact nature of a system fault.

6.6 If the alarm resets without any problem, the IC should make sure the event is recorded in the log book by the RP and provide relevant advice to prevent re-occurrence.

6.7 If previous faults have not been addressed by the RP, these should be highlighted to remind them of their responsibilities under the FSO. In such circumstances, it may be

appropriate to advise the RP to take the alarm off line until any maintenance issues have been dealt with. Advice should also include any extra fire safety control measures, such as marshalling the affected area(s) of the premises. A Fire Protection Officer may be contacted for advice.

Note – Ensure any information regarding cause and actions taken are recorded on the IRS under section 10.4.

6.8 If the alarm cannot be reset by the RP, the IC should advise them to contact their maintenance company for further advice or attendance. It is important that the RP understands their responsibility and the IC should inform them that they must call 999 in the event of a fire as the alarm will not be received by the Fire and Rescue Service if it is off-line.

6.9 Additional guidance for the RP to reduce UFAS

The RP should be encouraged to liaise with the ARC to confirm that correct details are held for the business, for example; open and closed times, contact details, key holder details and instructions on what to do when the fire alarm actuates.

6.10 For all premises except for residential care homes, RP's can arrange for the ARC to call the premises on receipt of an actuation signal or following a pre-determined period of time to allow an investigation to take place to confirm whether it is a false alarm before calling the Fire and Rescue Service.

6.11 Operational Personnel are reminded that at any point It may be necessary to seek advice from a Fire Protection officer.

## **7 Duties by Role**

7.1 Fire Control - To receive calls from the public and ARCs and, where appropriate call challenge as per current procedure.

7.2 Operational personnel - Attend AFAs to assist RPs in establishing cause and provide advice to prevent future reoccurrence of UFAS's.

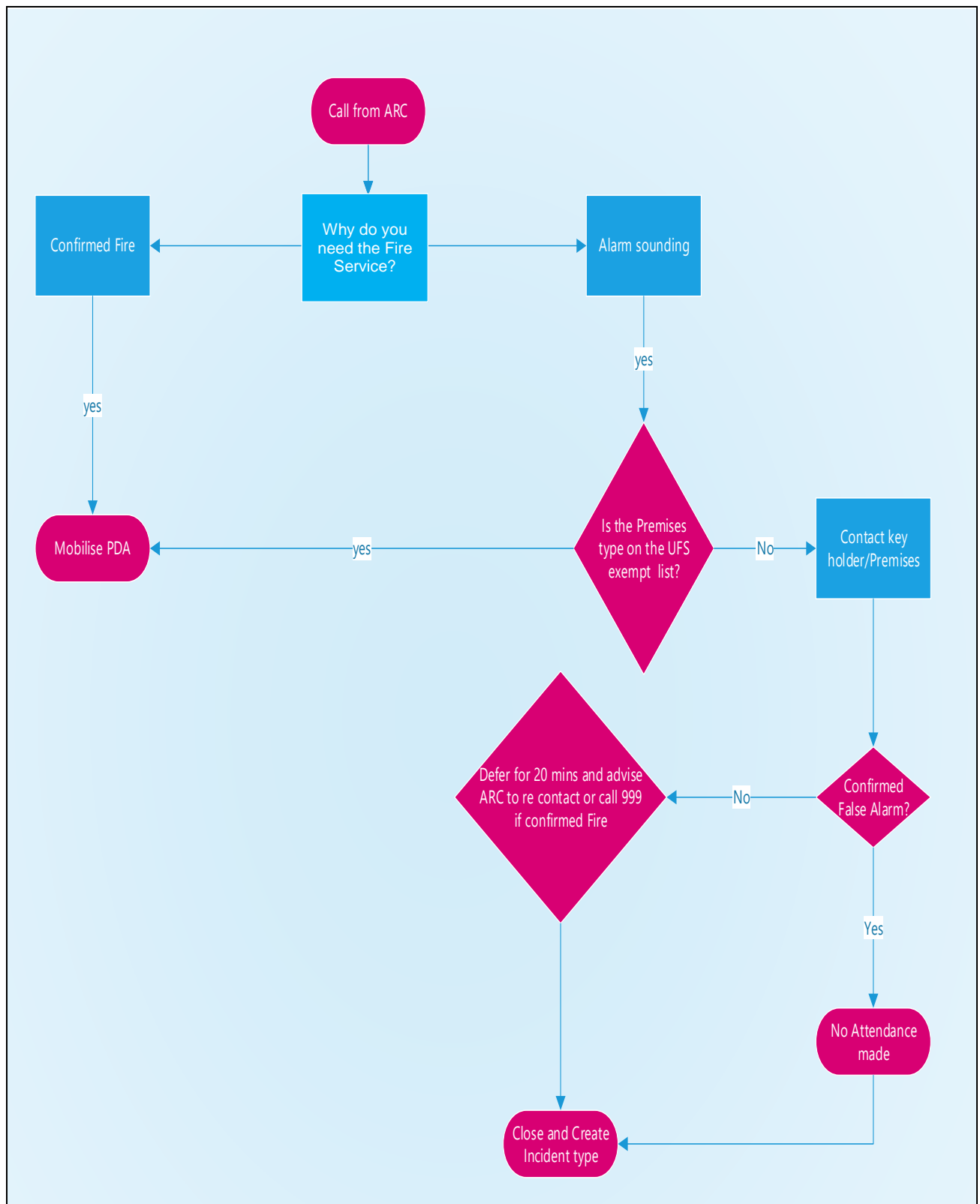
7.3 Responsible Person – Supervises all matters relating to the fire alarm system. This may be themselves, or a nominated person. Where the system is remotely monitored by an ARC, the RP is recommended to provide at least two key holders with a 20 minute response to the premises.

## **8 Performance monitoring, reporting and follow up enforcement**

8.1 Performance monitoring will be carried out as per each Services own procedures.

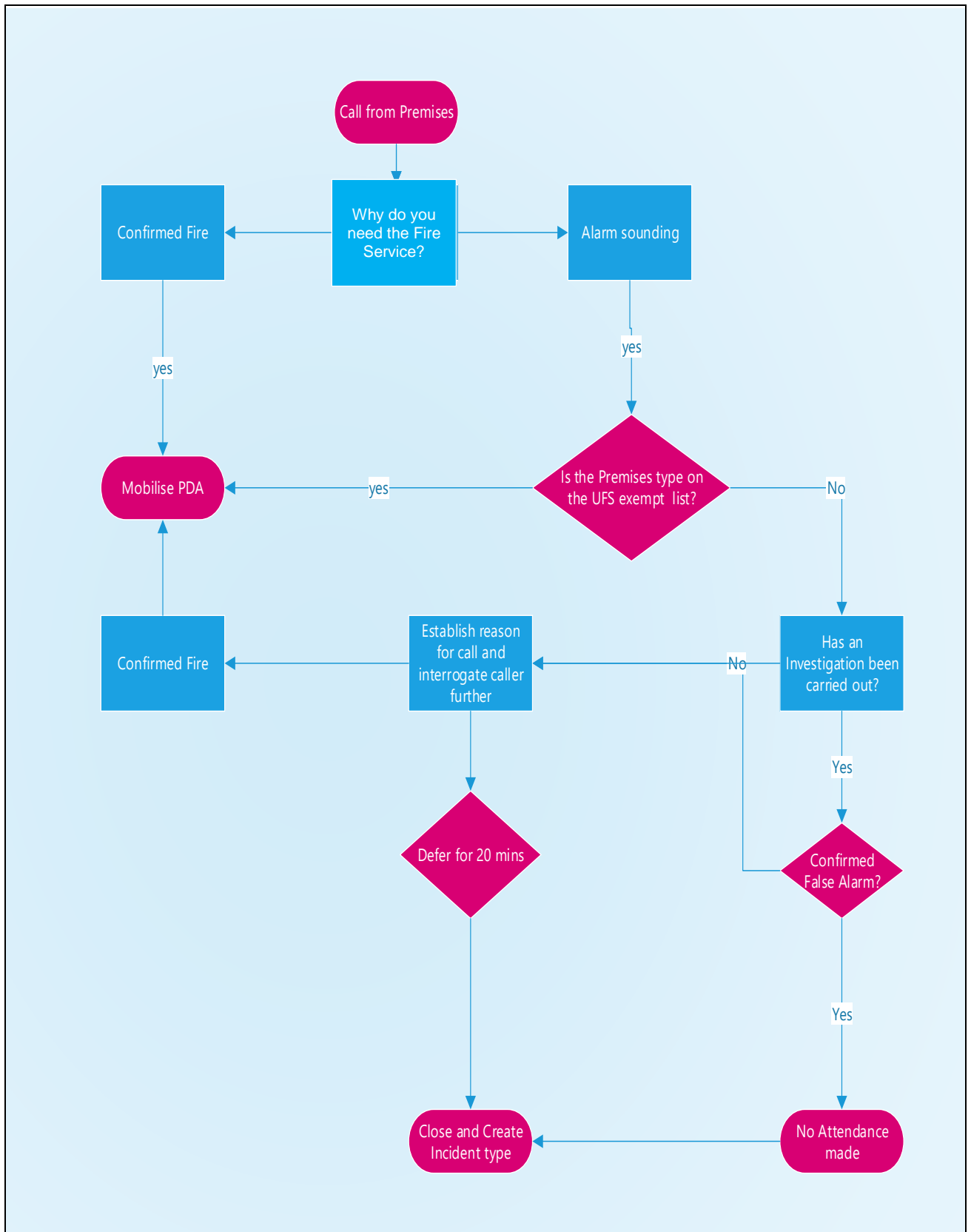


**Alarm receiving centre:**

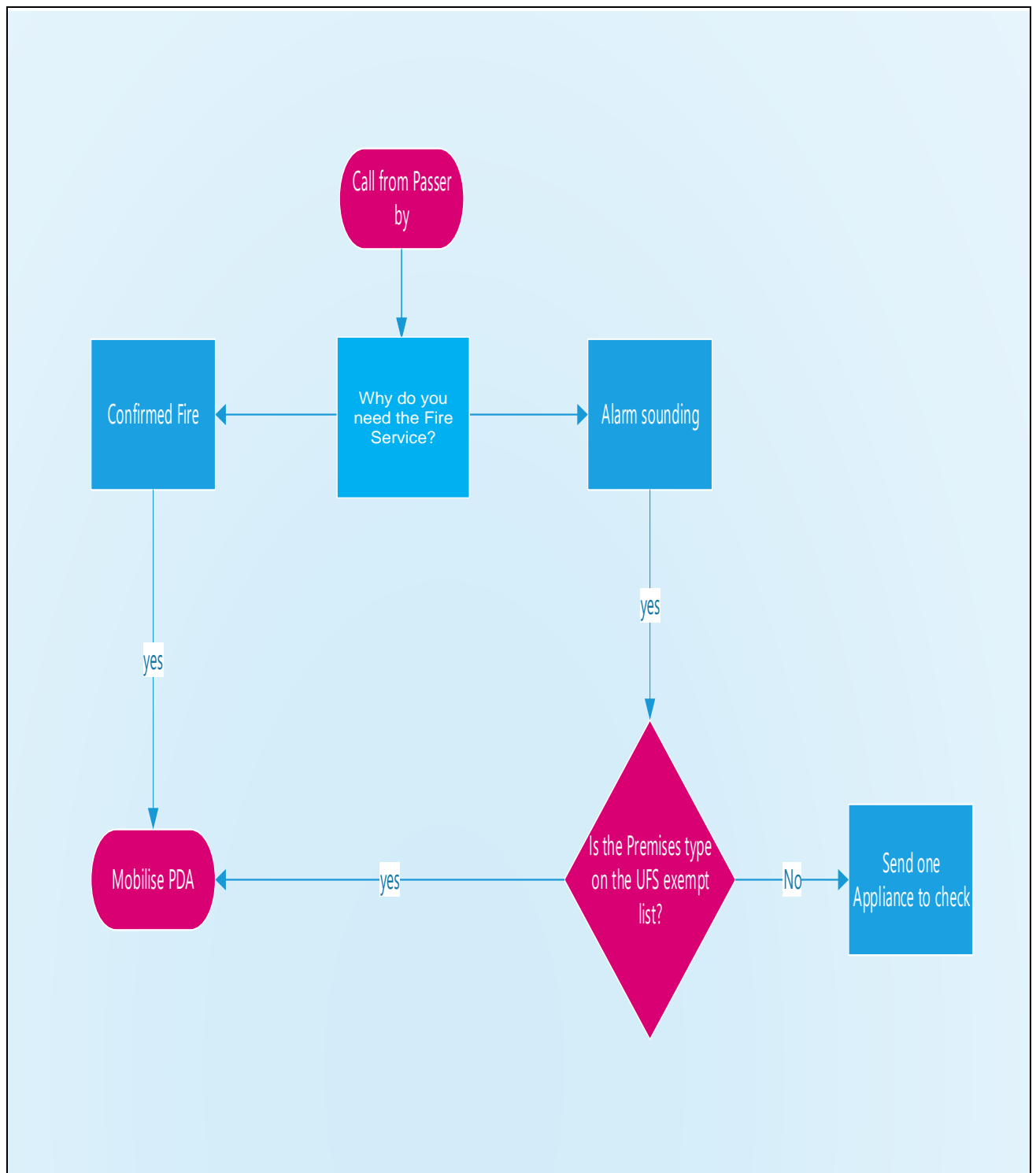




**Call from the Premises:**



**Call form a Passer-by:**



**AMENDMENT DOCUMENT**



# **Tri-Service Procedure for Unwanted Fire Signals**

## **Appendix**

### **Enforcement**

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**Example of first UFAS letter**

**Example of fourth UFAS letter**

**Example of sixth UFAS letter**

# APPENDIX

## 1.0 ENFORCEMENT HIERARCHY

- 1.1 In addition to the call challenge and/or response to an AFD system there will be a range of enforcement protocols which will be applied to all recognised UFAS's. Some premises will sit outside of this enforcement hierarchy.
- 1.2 Premises that do sit outside of this hierarchy will be locally determined and may include large or complex sites or those with a large number of detector heads.
- 2.0 Procedure is as follows;
  - 2.1 Operational personnel will record investigation findings from an UFAS on the Incident Reporting System, inputting appropriate data into section 10.4 as attained at the time. The data required in this section will include:
    - Zone actuation
    - Detector Head Identification/Number
    - Suspected Cause (Appendix B)
  - 2.2 This will be the first level of enforcement information as these records will be used to send a letter to the premises confirming that an UFAS has been attended by NFRS.
  - 2.3 If UFAS's continue a second letter will be issued that outlines the concerns of NFRS regarding the elevated instance of UFAS's at their premises. The Business Education Advisor will also make arrangements to talk to the responsible person (RP) and offer advice that aims to reduce these signals moving forward.
  - 2.4 If further UFASs are received then the Fire Protection department may contact the premises and conduct a full audit to ascertain the management status and possible enforcement action under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
  - 2.5 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 other UFAS's. NFRS personnel should inform Fire Control that the premises alarm system is "offline" and the premises RP must be advised that staff and their ARC are also made aware. An amendment to the premises Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) may also be appropriate through the "offline" period.

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2.6 If the response of the RP is unsatisfactory or instances of UFASs continue then the issue should be referred to the Fire Protection department for further action.

2.7 The Triggers for sending out UFAS's letters are:

- One or more UFAS's in any period of four weeks, for self-referral
- Four or more UFAS's in any period of twenty-six weeks, for Business Support intervention
- 6 or more UFAS'S in any period of twenty-six weeks, for a confirmed audit of the premises by a Fire Protection Inspecting Officer under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

2.8 Premises that sit outside of this enforcement hierarchy will have their performance monitored by the Fire Protection department with an accumulative report. This will be based on the previous 26 weeks and generated monthly to identify any areas of concern. Any issues arising from these reports will instigate contact with the RP of the premises from the Fire Protection department.

NB. All activity regarding UFAS's must be recorded using the Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS) to provide an auditable trail to support potential future enforcement action.

## SUSPECTED CAUSE CODES

Suspected Cause Codes	
Code	Classification
01	Malicious - by phone
02	Malicious - break glass deliberate
03	Malicious - SS Not required
04	Accidentally/carelessly set off
05	Testing
06	Smoking/Cooking
07	Poor Maintenance
08	System Faulty/Damaged
09	Incorrect positioning
10	Unsuitable equipment
11	Activated by smoke from outside source
12	Steam/smoke
13	Chemicals/aerosols
14	Dust/Thrips
15	Smoke Cloak
16	Power surge
17	Storm
18	Water supplies - sprinklers only
19	No cause found
20	Smell of burning
21	Person activated - burnt toast/food
22	Person seeing smoke/condensation
23	Reflected light/sunlight
24	Other
25	Good Intent
26	Not Known - property not found

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## EXAMPLE OF FIRST UFAS LETTER

Fire Protection Support Team  
Highfields Fire Station  
Hassocks Lane  
Beeston  
Nottingham  
NG9 2GQ

(Advice Line) Tel: 0115 957 5200  
Email: fireprotection@notts-fire.gov.uk

**Your Ref:**  
**Our Ref:**  
**Doc Ref:** v 3.0  
**Please Ask For:** Business Education Advocate  
**Direct Line/Ext:** 01159575200  
**Date:**

### **Re: Unwanted Fire Signals occurred at:**

on:

Dear Sir or Madam

### **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**

As you may be aware Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service(NFRS) attended your premises as a result of an alarm actuation. After investigation by our fire service personnel, the actuation was found to be false and therefore the incident has been recorded as an Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal (UFAS).

UFASs not only reduce the availability of fire appliances for real emergency incidents, they also have a major impact on the resources of the fire service as they disrupt other more productive work such as fire prevention and protection work and firefighter training.

It is estimated that up to 98% of the responses made to automatic fire alarm actuations in the UK require no fire fighting action at the scene which results in a loss of production and the general disruption of normal business activities. During 2017, NFRS attended over 3000 calls to automatic fire alarms that turned out to be UFASs, this cost our organisation in the region of £900,000.

Properly managed and maintained, an automatic fire alarm system with its fast response in the initial stages of a fire can be a significant factor in protecting life and limiting damage to your property. Unfortunately, the very features that provide this fast response can also produce UFASs arising from activities and events other than a fire situation. In addition, a system that generates these signals may not be effective as people will gradually lose confidence in the fire alarm system and therefore may not respond appropriately in a fire situation.

In order to assist you in managing your fire alarm system effectively and so reduce your UFASs, we recommend that you read the following information.

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### **The British Standard for Fire Alarms (BS 5839 part 1: 2017)**

BS 5839-1 requires that fire alarm systems must be designed, installed, commissioned, maintained and monitored to standards that minimise the likelihood of false alarms. A single, named person should be nominated to supervise all matters pertaining to the fire alarm system. This person is recognised by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 *article 18* as the 'Competent Person'. The role of the competent person is to ensure that the system is tested and maintained in accordance with the recommendations of BS 5839-1, appropriate records are kept and that relevant occupants in the protected premises are aware of their roles and responsibilities in connection with the fire alarm system. It should also be the duty of the competent person to ensure that the necessary steps are taken to avoid situations that are detrimental to the standard of protection afforded by the system, and to ensure that the level of false alarms is minimised.

Clause 47 of the standard recommends that the competent person;

- Supervises all matters pertaining to the fire alarm system.
- Ensures the alarm control panel is checked at least daily to ascertain whether there are any faults on the system.
- Ensures there are arrangements in place for testing and maintenance of the system.
- Ensures the log book is kept up to date and is available for inspection.
- Ensures relevant occupants of the protected premises are instructed on the proper use of the system and that all occupants are aware of the measures necessary to avoid false alarms.
- Ensures that appropriate action is taken to limit the rate of false alarms.
- Ensures fire detectors are not obstructed.
- Establishes liaison between those responsible for work on the building fabric to prevent damage to the alarm system and false alarms. The competent person also ensures that necessary changes to the alarm system are made if the premises or their occupancy are altered.
- Ensures records are updated when changes are made to the system.
- Ensures, where necessary, that a suitable zone plan is displayed and kept up to date.
- Ensures that spare parts for the alarm system are available.

Limiting the number of UFASs rests with both the responsible person and the competent person. It is incumbent on these persons to ensure that the fire alarm system and the building itself are suitably managed to avoid UFASs. Where these signals continue to occur, it is the responsible persons duty to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to reduce this rate to an acceptable level.

Systems in which the parties responsible have not taken adequate care to limit UFASs and as a result produced unacceptably high rates of UFASs, may be regarded by the enforcing authority as not being in accordance with BS 5839-1 and indicative of poor fire safety management systems.

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## Emergency Action Plan

A key factor in minimizing the disruption to your business when the fire alarm actuates falsely is to have in place an effective emergency action plan that is appropriate to the premises. This plan should be understood by all members of staff and include the actions to be taken by other persons such as visitors.

In most low risk buildings, particularly where there are large amounts of automatic fire detectors, it is reasonable to develop procedures that limit the degree of unnecessary disruption due to UFASs. In the event of the alarm sounding, the emergency action plan should nominate persons who will attend the fire alarm panel, identify where the fire is reported and then to go to that area to investigate the cause. By adopting an appropriate investigation strategy, false activations of the fire alarm system can be quickly identified.

Under BS 5839 – 1:2017 it is the duty of the RP to make sure all fire alarm activations are investigated. They should record appropriate details regarding every false alarm and/or unwanted fire alarm signal that occur. Information recorded should include the following:

- 1) date and time
- 2) identity and location of device (if known)
- 3) category of false alarm (if known)
- 4) reason for false alarm (if known)
- 5) activity in the area (if the reason for the false alarm is unknown)
- 6) action taken on the cause of the false alarm
- 7) whether the fire and rescue service were called

If your fire alarm system is remotely monitored by an Alarm Receiving Centre, you are required to provide at least 2 key holders to be available at all times the premises are unoccupied. **Each key holder should be capable of attending the premises within 20 minutes of being notified and have at least basic training in the operation of the alarm system** and, in addition, have access to all relevant areas of the building.

## The Regulatory reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

The responsible person and other persons in control of the premises, other than the responsible person, are required to provide effective fire precautions to ensure that, in so far as it relates to matters within their control, the workplace complies with all the relevant requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and that failure to do so may lead to enforcement action and/or prosecution.

Should you require any further information or advice on any of the above, then please contact our Business Education Advocate on the details at the head of this letter.

Yours faithfully

**ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE REQUIRED**

**Andrew Kelly**

Head of Fire Protection  
Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

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## EXAMPLE OF FOURTH UFAS LETTER

Fire Protection Support Team  
Highfields Fire Station  
Hassocks Lane  
Beeston  
Nottingham  
NG9 2GQ

(Advice Line) Tel: 0115 957 5200  
Email: fireprotection@notts-fire.gov.uk

**Your Ref:**  
**Our Ref:**  
**Doc Ref:** V 2.0  
**Please Ask For:** Business Education Advocate  
**Direct Line/Ext:** 0115 957 5200  
**Date:**

### **Re: Several Unwanted Fire Signals occurred at:**

Dear Sir or Madam

#### **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**

As part of our procedure to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals that we attend Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has developed a process to manage the impact on the service and to deal with premises with persistent unwanted fire signals.

As you will be aware we have attended your premises on a number of occasions due to actuations of your fire alarm system, last date of attendance

After investigation by fire service personnel, these actuations were found to be false. These incidents have therefore been recorded as unwanted fire signals.

We have previously written to you, advising on how to manage your fire alarm system, but the situation has not improved. Please now expect contact from our Business Support Department, who will work with you to try and stop further unwanted fire signals.

We therefore give notice that should we receive further calls which, on investigation, turn out to be unwanted fire signals, you may also be contacted by one of our Fire Protection Inspection Officers who will arrange to visit your premises in order to carry out a fire safety audit under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Yours faithfully

**ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE REQUIRED**

**Andrew Kelly**

Head of Fire Protection  
Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

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## EXAMPLE OF SIXTH UFAS LETTER

Your Ref:  
Our Ref: /  
Doc Ref: UWFS03 v. 2.0  
Please Ask For:  
Direct Line/Ext:  
Date:

Dear

### **THE REGULATORY REFORM (FIRE SAFETY) ORDER 2005**

I am writing to confirm that the date and time agreed on which the Fire Safety Audit will take place is: at  
hrs.

The reason for this inspection is due to your unacceptable level of unwanted fire signals which may  
indicate other issues with your fire safety management.

Please refer to the Advisory Notes enclosed which explains what will be required by the Fire Protection  
(Enforcement) Officer.

### **Enforcement Policy**

The Fire Authority is committed to the principles of the Enforcement Policy, details of which are available  
on request.

### **[INSERT STANDARD PARAGRAPH 'G\*\*', AND AT END OF LAST PAGE]**

You may also find it useful to visit our website [www.notts-fire.gov.uk](http://www.notts-fire.gov.uk) ('Business Safety') where further  
guidance on the risk assessment process is available.

If you wish to contact the Fire Protection office prior to our visit, please contact us at the above address.

Yours faithfully

**FIRE PROTECTION OFFICER**

Enc: Advisory Notes

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reading the most current version.

## APPENDIX HISTORY

<b>Version No.</b>		2.0	
<b>Replaces</b>		1.0	
<b>Summary of changes</b>		Removed from Unwanted Fire Signals Reduction Policy No. 2025 and added as appendices to Tri-Service procedure after major changes	
<b>Author</b>		Head of Protection	
<b>Department</b>		Protection	
<b>Approved by</b>		Head of Delivery	
<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Modified by</b>	<b>Changes</b>
2.0	03/12/2018	J. Caines	Removed from Unwanted Fire Signals Reduction Policy No. 2025 and added as appendices to Tri-Service procedure after major changes
<b>Assessments completed</b>			
<b>Review Period</b>		3 Years (next review December 2021)	