# Unwanted fire Signals (false alarms)

In the last five years Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) has sent its fire engines 32,685 times to premises, after receiving an automatic signal from an automatic fire alarm.

Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) provide an effective means of giving early warning of a potential fire within a premises and are especially effective and useful when the premises is unoccupied.

However, these systems are not fool proof and the vast majority (99.13%) of actuations from these systems require no action by the fire service.

Automatic fire detection can be actuated by many common airborne materials, such as dust, insects, steam, aerosol products and, also by faults with the system.

When an actuation of a fire alarm is automatically sent to the fire service (usually via an Alarm Receiving Centre), and the fire service mobilise their resources to the premises when they are not needed, this is deemed to be an **unwanted fire signal** (UwFS).

Unwanted Fire Signal (UwFS) cost businesses time and money and divert firefighters from genuine emergencies and other duties. We are committed to reducing the number of these false alarms and so have adopted a policy around how we respond to AFAs.

## Our policy

Premises that are provided with a fire detection system are classified as a ‘problem premises’ from an unwanted fire signal perspective, in the following circumstances:

* two or more unwanted fire signals are received in a four-week period.
* three or more unwanted fire signals are received in a 26-week period.
* the cause of the unwanted fire signal has not been remedied within seven days.

In these cases, further investigation will be undertaken by LFRS fire safety officers. This may take the form of a visit/telephone call or by use of any of the UwFS enquiry letters which can be used to help responsible persons understand LFRSs UwFS policy and the reasons for its introduction.

Where a premises falls into the category of a ‘problem premises’ and persistently have unwanted fire signals, LFRS will undertake a ‘targeted’ inspection of the premises to discuss and deal with the specific issue. The purpose of this inspection is to deal with any obvious causes of the UwFS e.g., unsuitable detector heads in areas of the building likely to give false alarms, and to discuss with the responsible person, management actions that may reduce the occurrence of UwFS. In most cases this engagement results in the issues being resolved, however in some cases it may result in enforcement action by LFRS should the UwFS persist with no engagement/action by the responsible person.

## What can you do?

There are some things that you can do to help reduce the number of false fire alarms (unwanted fire signals) at your premises.

## Good practice

It will obviously depend on your specific problem, but some general good practices should include:

* Ensure that your fire alarm is subjected to a regular system of maintenance and tested on a regular basis. These procedures should be recorded appropriately.
* Ensure the fire alarm system and detection is appropriate to the risk within your premises.
* Consider implementing a delay in the system to allow for investigation. This action will prevent our attendance unless a fire is present. It is important you seek advice from your local Fire Safety department before you implement this.
* Consider upgrading older fire alarm systems. The money invested can save on lost business or operation because of unwanted fire signals.
* Ensure all relevant persons (employees, contractors, visitors, residents) are made aware of the impact of unwanted fire signals - both on the premises /business and on the fire and rescue service.
* During the summer months consider fixing flea collars to specific detector heads that are known to be vulnerable to insect infiltration. This should be undertaken by a competent fire alarm engineer.
* Ensure that there is a point of contact for attending an activation out-of-hour.
* Ensure that those persons who are responsible for the management of the fire alarm system are familiar with how it functions and how to reset it.
* Appoint a responsible person, as per the requirements of the Fire Safety Order 2005, to ensure all matters relating to fire safety within the premises (including the fire alarm system) are adhered to.

## Contact us

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service is actively working with businesses and organisations across the county to reduce unwanted fire signals from automatic fire detection systems.

If you have a problem with repeat false fire alarm activations or you would like to discuss the issue of false alarms (unwanted fire signals) in general, please contact your local Protection Team.