FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:
CORRECTIVE ACTIONS FOR FALSE ALARMS
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From the Office of the Fire Prevention Bureau – Phone (515) 283-4240

This document is designed to assist you in correcting an issue that led to a false alarm. If you received a false alarm notice, below the incident time and date, there will be a short description of the observations documented during the response. Below is suggested corrective actions for each of those observations. We hope this information will help you avoid false alarms and subsequent fines in the future.

1. Contractor testing/work on a fire protection system.
Sometimes contractors perform work on your fire protection systems. During these instances it is imperative to notify your monitoring company. When notifying your monitoring company about testing or maintenance work on the fire protection system, it is critically important to also notify them when this work is complete.

Note: When a final inspection is scheduled with the Des Moines Fire Department Fire Prevention Bureau, the fire alarm system and monitoring must be “live” during the initial test. These instances are not billed as false alarms, because the DMFD is already on-site, we can avoid having fire trucks respond to this alarm.

2. Sprinkler pipe break due to inadequate heating of the space.
NFPA 13 mandates that areas where sprinkler pipes (wet systems) are located, the ambient temperature must be maintained at or above 40°F in order to prevent freezing. Iowa winters can be cold and it is imperative that your fire sprinkler system remain functional. Sometimes areas above drop ceilings are subject to drafts and other influxes of cold air, maintaining 40°F can be difficult, but is absolutely necessary. Also watch for locations within your building that are subject to drafts/bursts of cold air (e.g. overhead garage doors, vestibules, and attics); on very cold days and when doors are left open for prolonged periods of time, sprinkler pipes may freeze and burst causing unwanted damage, a false alarm, and rendering your building unprotected from fire for a period of time.

3. Construction or maintenance work not associated with the fire protection system.
Frequently dust from concrete cutting, other carpentry work, or even thorough cleaning can be “kicked up” into the air and cause a false alarm within a smoke detector. It is important that these activities are planned for and the fire alarm system is accounted for prior to the dust causing a false alarm. Dust covers, alarm verification, and/or impairment programs are all suitable alternatives to potentially avoid unnecessary false alarms.

4. Duct smoke detection device improperly programmed as an alarm signal.
The International Fire Code requires duct smoke detectors to initiate a visible and audible supervisory signal at a constantly attended location. This programming can avoid unnecessary alarm activations frequently caused by duct detectors that have been erroneously programmed as alarm signals. Contact your fire alarm contractor to make the necessary programming changes to avoid these false alarms in the future.
5. **Detection device installed too close to a mechanical device (e.g. HVAC diffuser, boiler)**
   Detectors are required to be installed a minimum of three (3) feet from air diffusers and other mechanical equipment that can lead to false alarms. If your detectors are too close, there is a good chance they may cause false alarms. Contact your fire alarm contractor to make the necessary system modifications (moving detectors) to avoid these false alarms in the future.

6. **Sprinkler activation/break due to other event (e.g. forklift hit sprinkler), not a cold exposure.**
   Sprinklers are sensitive devices, designed to break apart when there is a sustained temperature increase near the sprinkler. If these devices are stuck by another object (forklift, hanger, ball, etc.) they can be broken and cause an unnecessary discharge of water, which leads to a false alarm. Working with your employees and guests to respect these devices (sprinklers) and the important role they play in our safety will hopefully pay dividends in avoid future false alarms due to damaging these components. If a forklift hit a sprinkler in the racking system of your warehouse, you may want to contact a fire sprinkler contractor to see if there is an option to remove the in-rack sprinklers and protect your storage from the ceiling sprinklers only. Advances in sprinkler technology have recently made in-rack sprinklers avoidable in certain situations.

7. **Other- unknown cause.**
   The information able to be obtained on-scene by the Des Moines Fire Officer was not able to determine the direct cause of the false alarm. This may have been due to the fact that personnel on-scene prior to the fire department’s arrival reset the alarm panel. It is critical that on-site personnel do not tamper with the fire alarm panel prior to the fire department’s arrival. We need the valuable information contained in the fire alarm panel (prior to resetting it) to determine the location and extent of the alarm activation. Please instruct your personnel to refrain from resetting the fire alarm panel prior to our arrival.

Any comments or questions regarding the above information may be submitted to:

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