

False Fire Alarm Reduction Guide



Tasmania Fire Service



Includes pull-out Risk Assessment Form



**False fire
alarms**



**The
impacts**



**What you
can do**



What are false fire alarms?

A false alarm occurs when an automatic fire alarm system activates for reasons other than fire.

An alarm is only deemed as false after the Tasmania Fire Service has assessed the alarm's cause.

Tasmania Fire Service works with the community to reduce false alarms.

Each year, the Tasmania Fire Service responds to approximately 4,500 false alarms. On average, this equates to more than 12 false alarms each day of the year.



To find out more, go to
fire.tas.gov.au

The Tasmania Fire Service has a responsibility to respond to every notification of a fire.

There are three ways that Tasmania Fire Service may be notified of a fire alarm activation:

- Automatic notification from a Tasmania Fire Service monitored building.
- Calls to attend to activated fire alarms through privately monitored alarm systems.
- Calls to attend to activated fire alarms through public notification.

Causes of false alarms

There are many causes of false alarms, here are some of the more common:

	Insufficient or poor building maintenance.
	Smoke resulting from cooking activities or burning food (such as toast).
	Steam from showers, cleaning, and cooking.
	Aerosols such as deodorant and insect spray.
	Smoke and fumes from cigarettes, vaping, candles, and incense.
	Maintenance works on buildings that create dust or fumes.
	Malicious or accidental manual call point or break glass alarm activations.
	Detectors in areas not suited for their purpose (i.e. smoke detectors in kitchens).
	Poor ventilation.
	Insect infestations (particularly in larger factory buildings).
	Activities or work practices undertaken in an area not designed for that use. For example, cooking outside of a designated kitchen.



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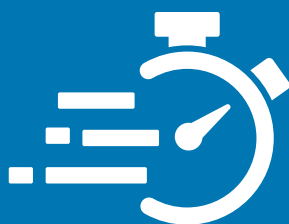
What are the impacts of false fire alarms?

The Tasmania Fire Service has a legal obligation to monitor fire alarms in certain buildings for a variety of reasons. Monitored alarms enable a quicker response through early fire detection and reduces the risk of exposure to fire and other hazards for occupants and firefighters.

With greater numbers of monitored fire alarms, also comes increased false alarms. The occurrence of false alarms can harm the community in many ways:



Can lead to loss of productivity and business function.



Delays Tasmania Fire Service operational response times to real emergencies.



An increased risk of injury to firefighters and the public.





Many firefighters are volunteers and responding to false alarms can impact their private lives. Over time, this can lead to avoidable fatigue.



Repeated false alarms can lead to complacency among building occupants in the event of a real fire emergency.



Financial penalties to building owners.



Building owners can incur extra costs to maintain and test faulty fire alarm systems.

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Foundational Training for False Fire Alarm Reduction

This training will equip you with the necessary knowledge to complete the risk assessment of your building and begin taking action to reduce false fire alarms. The below video modules are available on the TFS website.

Module 1: Understanding your Fire Alarm System

Key Learning Outcomes

- Familiarity with components and their functions.
- Comprehension of network and communication processes.
- Grasping the importance of prompt response to alarm incidents.

Scan the QR code to access this module:



Module 2: Common Causes of False Fire Alarms

Key Learning Outcomes

- Environmental factors (e.g. dust, humidity)
- Cooking smoke and steam.
- System faults.
- User error and misuse.

Scan the QR code to access this module:



Module 3: Preventive Measures

Key Learning Outcomes

- Regular maintenance and testing.
- Reporting malfunctions and false fire alarms to TFS.
- Educating staff and visitors
- Performing a risk assessment of your building.

Scan the QR code to access this module:



Module 4: System Readiness and Technical Prevention

Key Learning Outcomes

- Engaging your alarm system contractor.
- Ensuring room activities and equipment match the intended design of the fire alarm system.
- Exploring technology and placement solutions.
- Isolation Procedures.

Scan the QR code to access this module:



False Alarm Risk Assessment Form

Your Building's Risk Assessment

Building Information

Building name

Location / address

Contact person

Contact email

Contact phone

Date of Assessment

After Hours Contact Number

Alarm Maintenance Company

TIP Ensure that all contact information provided is accurate and up to date. Having correct contact details is crucial for effective communication with emergency services.

Section 1: False Fire Alarm History

Total False Alarms in the Last Year

Description of Recent False Alarms: (Date, Time, Cause)

TIP Make sure to keep thorough records of recent false alarms. Write down the date, time, and why each incident happened. This can be useful for figuring out how to stop false alarms from happening again. TFS may be able to assist you with the collection of this information.

False Alarm Risk Assessment Form

Section 2: Potential Causes and Reduction Strategies

Environmental Factors: (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Dust or particles
- ☐ Steam or humidity
- ☐ Cooking fumes
- ☐ Insects or pests
- ☐ Other (specify)

TIP Find and test things in your environment that might cause false alarms in your building. Think about ways to reduce these factors and prevent false alarms. Write down your strategies so you can use them when necessary.

Mitigation strategy

Equipment Issues: (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Faulty detectors
- ☐ Wiring problems
- ☐ Battery issues
- ☐ Panel malfunctions
- ☐ Other (Specify)

TIP Fire alarm systems require regular maintenance. To avoid equipment problems that might cause false alarms, make sure a licensed technician fixes issues when found to keep the system working well.

Mitigation strategy

User Error or Training Needs: (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Inadequate staff training
- ☐ Lack of accountability
- ☐ Uninformed contractors/visitors
- ☐ Inconsistent Isolation Procedures
- ☐ Other (specify)

TIP Make sure everyone on your staff knows how the alarm system works and what happens when there are false alarms. Many false alarms are a consequence of gaps in understanding of best practices.

Mitigation strategy

Maintenance and Testing: (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Irregular maintenance
- ☐ Incomplete testing
- ☐ Outdated equipment
- ☐ Lack of documentation
- ☐ Other (Specify)

TIP Building owners are responsible for ensuring the alarm system is maintained by trained and licensed technicians.

Mitigation strategy

False Alarm Risk Assessment Form

Section 3: Additional Comments and Support

Additional Comments or Observations:

Support Needed: (Check all that apply)

☐

Technical support

☐

Training for staff

☐

Equipment replacement

☐

System upgrade

☐

Other (specify)

Please contact us at TFSFARS@fire.tas.gov.au to discuss support options.

TIP Feel free to share detailed comments or observations in this part of the form. Your insights can be very helpful in understanding why false alarms happen. If you need support on any of the help options listed, please get in touch using the email or phone number we've provided. We're here to assist you in addressing your concerns and making your alarm system more reliable.

Comments

Conclusion

This form serves as a valuable tool in safeguarding your building against the impacts of false fire alarms. By systematically evaluating the risks, considering mitigation strategies, and utilising the provided resources, you are taking proactive steps to reduce the likelihood of false alarms. Remember, our commitment to your safety and efficiency extends beyond this assessment. Should you require any support or additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out to our dedicated team. Together, we can ensure a secure environment while minimising the disruptions and costs associated with false fire alarms. Thank you for your diligence and commitment to safety.

What can you do?



Minimising false alarms is crucial to keeping people safe and avoid unnecessary disruptions and costs. Building owners can take several measures to minimise false fire alarms.



Regular Maintenance and Testing

Ensure that fire alarm systems, including smoke detectors, heat detectors, and alarm panels, are regularly inspected and maintained by licensed technicians.

Conduct routine testing of alarm equipment to ensure their proper functioning.

Maintain detailed records of all inspections, maintenance, and repairs related to the fire alarm system. These records can help identify recurring issues and areas for improvement.



Proper Installation

Ensure that fire alarm systems are installed by licensed technicians according to relevant codes and standards. Proper installation is crucial for preventing false alarms.





Education and Training

- Your fire protection contractor may be able to provide you with some training and guidance on how your fire alarm system works and how to reduce false alarms.
- Develop and communicate clear fire safety procedures to all occupants.
- Develop procedures for the isolation of fire alarm systems prior to maintenance works or work practices occurring that may trigger a false alarm. Ensure staff are trained to isolate the fire alarm system.



Address Environmental Factors

- Identify and address environmental factors that can trigger false alarms, such as dust, humidity, and cooking fumes, by using appropriate detector types and maintenance practices.
- Ensure your building is prepared for major weather events that may trigger false fire alarms, such as rain and flooding



Upgrade Technology

- Consider upgrading to modern fire alarm systems that use advanced technologies, such as multi-sensor detectors and intelligent alarm panels, which are less prone to false alarms.
- Stay informed about the latest advancements in fire alarm technology and best practices for improvement. Your fire alarm contractor can provide you with advice on new technology.





Zone Design and Programming

- Design and program fire alarm zones to minimise the impact of isolated incidents on the entire building. This can help contain false alarms to specific areas.



Review False Alarms

- Conduct regular reviews of false alarm incidents to identify patterns and causes. Use this information to put in place preventive measures.



Third-Party Inspection

- Periodically bring in third-party experts to conduct an independent evaluation of the fire alarm system's performance and identify potential issues.
- Ensure the building's essential services are maintained in line with the relevant maintenance schedule.

Reducing false fire alarms involves being proactive with system maintenance, educating building occupants, and making ongoing improvements. By following these steps, building owners can lower the risk of false fire alarms.

False Fire Alarm Charges



The Tasmania Fire Service applies a false fire alarm charge as part of the False Fire Alarm Reduction Program. The charge is intended to encourage the effective management of fire alarm systems and support the reduction of preventable false fire alarms.

Purpose of the charge

- Encourages proactive maintenance and management of fire alarm systems.
- Deters behaviours that lead to false fire alarms, such as tampering with detectors or poor occupant supervision.
- Supports cost recovery for resources spent on unnecessary callouts.
- Promotes community safety by reducing disruptions and delays.
- Every false fire alarm prevented allows firefighters to respond faster to real emergencies.



Concessions for False Fire Alarm Charges

Some false fire alarms are beyond an owner's control. To ensure fairness, the following concessions apply:

- **Grace period after connection** - A short period after a new alarm system is connected allows for testing and adjustment without charges.
- **24-hour leniency** - If multiple alarms occur within 24 hours from the same system fault, only the first is charged.
- **Extreme weather** - Alarms clearly caused by severe storms, lightning, flooding, or bushfire smoke are not charged.

These concessions make sure the charge targets avoidable false fire alarms while recognising genuine circumstances.



Billing and Waiver Process

- **Who pays?** The registered owner of the property.
- **When?** An invoice is issued after each chargeable false fire alarm.
- **How much?** The charge amount depends on the financial year (see online).
- **How to pay?** Via the standard payment options listed on the invoice.

In some cases, building owners may apply for a waiver of the charge, or the application of a discounted charge. The discounted charge is 20% of the total charge initially applied.

Eligibility

- Where the false fire alarm was beyond the owner's reasonable control. (full waiver)
- Where immediate corrective action was taken to prevent recurrence. (discounted charge)

How to Apply



- Use the QR code to complete the Waiver Application Form.
- Provide supporting documents (e.g. maintenance records, service reports).
- Submit within 30 days of receiving the invoice.

More Information



Visit the Tasmania Fire Service Website:
fire.tas.gov.au

Contact the Building Safety Unit:

- **Hobart:**
(03) 6166 5615
BuildingSafetySouth@fire.tas.gov.au
- **Launceston:**
(03) 6777 3666
BuildingSafetyNorth@fire.tas.gov.au
- **Burnie:**
(03) 6477 7250
BuildingSafetyNW@fire.tas.gov.au

If you have an emergency call Triple Zero (000)

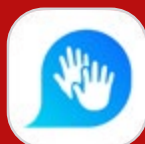


Only call Triple Zero (000) in an emergency that is life-threatening or where time is critical.

- Ask for Fire, Police or Ambulance.
- **Stay calm**, don't shout, speak slowly and clearly.
- When asked, give as much detail about your location as you can **including state, street number and name, suburb, nearest cross street.**

If you are deaf, hard of hearing or have difficulties with speech, you can contact emergency services through:

- **National Relay Service**
accesshub.gov.au
- **Expression Australia Auslan Emergency Interpreter app**
expression.com.au



Learn more at:
fire.tas.gov.au

Free-call 1800 000 699



Also available:



Home Fire Safety Guide



Visual Guide to Home Fire Safety



After the fire



Using fire outdoors



Fire Incidents and Warnings:

TASALERT.com



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