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For more information contact:



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Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police
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Virginia Burglar & Fire
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The key to
reducing the
number of
false alarms is
right at the end
of your finger.



Over the years, more and more homeowners and businesses have installed alarm systems. Although they are highly effective, the downside is an overabundance of false alarms, placing an undue burden on local police departments.

How you can help

Over 80% of false alarms are the result of human error, and 50% of those errors occur when the alarm is being turned on and off. So here are some tips from the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and the Virginia Burglar & Fire Alarm Association to help you reduce the possibility of false alarms in your home or business.

- > Carefully review your alarm monitoring company's procedures for cancelling accidental alarms. Insist that written instructions are provided to you. Do NOT call 911 if you accidentally set off your alarm.
- > Educate every person authorized to enter your home or business on how the system works.
- > Make sure people authorized to use your system always have the appropriate passcode.
- > Keep doors and windows locked when the system is armed.
- > Use deadbolt locks.
- > Follow your alarm company's instructions on testing your system. Don't test it by setting it off prior to notifying your alarm company.
- > Know how to clear a wrong code if you make a mistake on the keypad.

> Doors and windows must be tight fitting, and contacts should be free of paint and varnish.

> Choose a system that is tolerant of pets. If pets run free in the house, you should ask your alarm company for a motion detector that accommodates pets. Also some dog barks can activate older glass break detectors.

How your alarm company can help

- > Ask if the company is a member of the Virginia Burglar & Fire Alarm Association and has proper licenses.
- > Before selecting a system, ask the company about equipment with proven low false alarm rates.
- > Obtain a written instruction manual.
- > Insist on getting thorough training on operating the system.
- > Make sure the main control panel battery is replaced periodically by your alarm company, typically every three to five years.
- > Contact your alarm company immediately if you are having any problem with the alarm system, including any unexplained signal.
- > The company must use multiple call verification by making at least two calls to verify every alarm signal, except fire, duress or hold-up alarms, before calling the police.
- > If the alarm is false, the company must immediately attempt to cancel the police dispatch.

> Ensure that the company has someone on call 24/7 for service or to answer questions.

> Make sure the company has written instructions about the person or persons it is supposed to call before requesting police dispatch.

How local government is responding to the false alarm problem

Many Virginia municipalities have chosen to enact and enforce local alarm ordinances, some of which include alarm registration and permits with nominal fees for every alarm user. Some are issuing fines for false alarms. Others are providing mandatory false alarm classes to better inform homeowners and businesses about correct operation of equipment. Some police departments have even suspended responses to alarms for chronic abusers.

But the real message in this brochure is that if alarm users and alarm companies do their best to operate and maintain their systems properly, the number of false alarms will decrease dramatically.

