

# SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Fight Crime, Reduce Fear, Build Community  
John Diaz, Chief of Police

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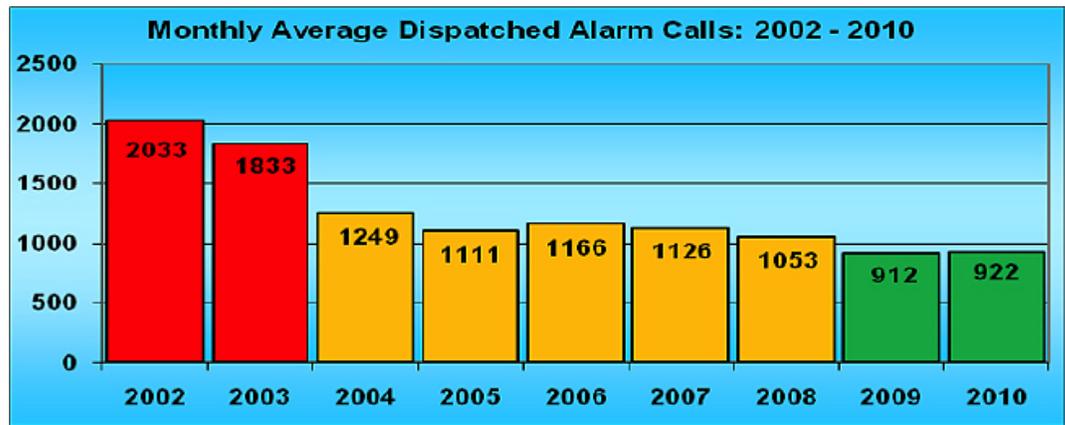
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## FALSE ALARM PROGRAM

Contact: [false.alarms@seattle.gov](mailto:false.alarms@seattle.gov)  
or 206 684-7713

### WHAT IS THE FALSE ALARM PROGRAM?

Prior to the implementation of the 2004 Ordinance, the Seattle Police Department responded to an average of 25,000 alarm calls a year with over 97% of them being false. False alarm response essentially takes many needed patrol officers off the street each year, a waste of a valuable resource. The Seattle Police Department now responds to fewer than 11,000 false alarm calls a year. Despite this reduction, responding to false alarms costs the City of Seattle an excess of one million dollars annually.



The 2004 ordinance made these significant changes to our policies to obtain the reduction of alarm responses:

- We began billing alarm companies directly for use of police services including the alarm registration and false alarm fees.
- Basing the registration and alarm fees of cost recovery. The fee structure was not designed to generate a profit for the city, but to recover the costs of police dispatch and response.
- Calls canceled by the alarm company prior to police dispatch would not be billed.
- We now require alarm companies to be licensed and used enhanced call verification prior to requesting police dispatch.
- Requiring physical evidence of need for a police dispatch to consider an alarm call valid (an alarm signal, open doors, or open windows are not considered valid alarms).
- We offer a waiver, once every 84 months for those that attend an alarm user workshop or switch to private guard response.

Because of the high number of false alarms, police response to alarm calls is a low priority and cannot be guaranteed. The False Alarm Unit recommends that alarm users contact their alarm company to discuss private security guard dispatch. This can be a more timely method of getting a response to your burglar alarm and aids the police department by reducing false alarm dispatches. Your police department is required to respond to a much larger scope of issues and your response may be delayed due to higher priority calls for service.

### CURRENT FEE SCHEDULE

In 2004, the yearly registration fee was set to \$40 and the false alarm fee was set to \$125. In 2005, the yearly registration fee was reduced to \$10 and the false alarm fee was dropped to \$90. Those fees remained at that level for five years despite increased program costs and inflation.

FEE SCHEDULE	
TYPE OF ALARM	FEE
Automated (Burglar)	\$115

Beginning January 1, 2011, the City of Seattle will use a new fee structure for billing false automated (burglar) and activated (panic) alarms. The yearly registration fee remains the same. The new fees are \$115 for a false automated alarm and \$230 for a false activated alarm. The fee for an alarm cancelled after the officer has been dispatched, but prior to arrival has not changed, and will remain \$30.

<b>Activated (Panic/Duress/Robbery)</b>	<b>\$230</b>
<b>Canceled after Dispatch, Prior to Arrival</b>	<b>\$30</b>
<b>Canceled before Dispatch</b>	<b>\$0</b>

Activated alarms consist of approximately 10% of the false alarms that have a police response and about half of these are from commercial businesses. Given their nature, these calls require a higher priority police response and typically utilize more resources than the average automated alarm call. Activated alarms thus involve greater liability for the City and unlike false automated alarms there is not a No Response Policy in place to deal with locations that have chronic false activated alarms. In addition, the false alarm rate for activated alarms is almost identical to the false alarm rate for burglar alarms. The False Alarm Unit has noted that other jurisdictions in the greater Seattle area have established separate fees for automated and activated alarms, assigning a higher fee to false activated alarms.

To help reduce the chance of accidental activation of an alarm and possibly being responsible for an alarm fee, we recommend that you review your alarm system instructions:

- Most alarm systems include a panic button; however, alarm installers may not explain how they are used so be sure you receive instructions. Key fob controllers for alarm systems are notorious for accidental trips. You might consider storing your key fob inside some kind of device that would not allow accidental trips.
- You alarm company might be able to deactivate panic buttons if they are not needed
- Review your alarm company's policies for activated alarms. Many alarms are silent and the alarm company will most likely not call to verify, so you would not know that you even activated the alarm until officers arrive. Your alarm company may be able to make the alarm audible or call to verify the alarm before contacting the police

During a time of duress while at home, we suggest that in lieu of activating your panic button you call 9-1-1. This puts you in direct contact with police dispatch and allows you to provide vital information for responding officers. Activating an alarm, instead of calling 9-1-1, allows precious minutes to elapse before the police are aware that a priority response is necessary.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

**What is a false alarm?** [see answer +](#)

**What is the difference between Burglary/Intrusion Alarms vs. Robbery/Panic/Duress (RPD) Alarms?** [see answer +](#)

**Will the police still respond to emergencies if my alarm company is not licensed?** [see answer +](#)

**Why is there a fee for false alarms?** [see answer +](#)

**Who pays for false alarms?** [see answer +](#)

**How does SPD know if a company is licensed?** [see answer +](#)

**I just got a new alarm system, do I need to obtain a permit from the city of Seattle or the Police Department? Do I need to notify the Department about my new alarm system?** [see answer +](#)

**What does the alarm industry say about the policy?** [see answer +](#)

**Does this program make a difference?** [see answer +](#)

**Who can I contact if I have more questions about alarms and police response?** [see answer +](#)



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