

Alarm systems have become a standard installation in commercial and residential buildings. Although they are highly effective, the negative impact is that local law enforcement is inundated with false alarms. In 2024, the Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office responded to 2,090 commercial alarms, an average of 174 alarms a month. Reducing false alarms permits deputies to focus their attention on other community needs.

How YOU can help

Over 80% of false alarms result from human error, and 50% of those errors occur when the alarm is 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 canceling accidental alarms. Insist on being provided with written instructions. DO NOT call 911 if you accidentally set off your alarm.
- ❖ Remember your passcode to cancel the 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 alarmed.
- ❖ Use deadbolt locks.

- ❖ Follow your alarm company's instructions for testing your system. Don't test it by setting it off before 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.
- ❖ Ensure that the batteries in devices are replaced according to manufacturer recommendations.
- ❖ Be cognizant that balloons and other types of devices frequently set off motion alarms.
- ❖ Ensure the Sheriff's Office has updated keyholder information for your business.

How your ALARM Company can help

- Ask if the company is a Virginia Burglar & Fire Alarm Association member and has proper licenses.
- Before selecting a system, ask the company about equipment with proven low false alarm rates.
- Insist on getting thorough training on operating the system.
- Your alarm company should replace the main control panel battery periodically, typically every 3 to 5 years.
- Ensure the system is serviced regularly.

- Contact your alarm company immediately if you have any problem with the alarm system, including any unexplained signal.
- The company must use multiple call verification, 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 duty 24/7 to provide service or answer questions.
- Before requesting police dispatch, make sure the company has written instructions about the person or persons they are supposed to call.

Spotsylvania County Alarm Ordinance

- ❖ In January 1999, the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors enacted and enforced a local alarm ordinance to reduce the number of false alarms.
- ❖ False alarm fees for commercial buildings are charged after the third false alarm during any 180-day successive period.
- ❖ The third false alarm is \$50.
- ❖ The fourth false alarm is \$75.
- ❖ The fifth and subsequent false alarm is \$150.
- ❖ **Only commercial businesses will be charged.**
 - ❖ The primary message of this brochure is that if alarm users and alarm companies do their best to operate and maintain their alarm systems properly, the number of false alarms will decrease.

Spotsylvania County Alarm Definitions and Fees:

False alarm: Any communication generated by or as a result of a security alarm system operated by alarm company operators on a commercial premise that results in a response and investigation by a law enforcement officer that reveals no evidence or indication of criminal activity or other actual hazard. An alarm dispatch request that is canceled by an alarm company operator or other person acting on behalf of the owner of a commercial security alarm system before the responding law enforcement officer reaches the alarm site shall not be considered a false alarm dispatch.

Civil Penalty: A fee shall be assessed for each occurrence property occupant who activates, utilizes, operates, and/or maintains a commercial security alarm system operated by alarm company operators within Spotsylvania County, for the third (\$50), fourth (\$75), fifth and subsequent (\$150) false alarms, during any period of 180 days successive days, other than an intentional false alarm, originating from the protected premises.



SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

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FALSE ALARMS

