

## City of Bellevue's False Alarm Reduction Program Update

### **BACKGROUND:**

In 2014, Bellevue police officers responded to 3,871 false alarms, costing over \$125,000 in staff time. On December 4, 2014, Bellevue City Council passed the False Alarm Ordinance with the goal of reducing false alarms at residential and commercial properties, allowing police resources to be used more effectively. The ordinance requires alarm registration and includes a civil penalty process for false alarm activations.

The City contracted with a third-party vendor, Public Safety Corporation (PSC), to administer the registration, billing, notifications, and fine collection associated with the False Alarm Reduction Program (FARP). In July 2015, the Bellevue Police Department began educating the public on the new law and registration information was sent to monitored alarm users. Registration, billing, and enforcement of the new law began on October 1, 2015.

### **THE PROGRAM:**

The False Alarm Reduction Program (FARP) is designed to fulfill the goals of the ordinance through a multi-pronged approach:

**REGISTRATION:** alarm system registration prevents delays in response due to incomplete or inaccurate addresses, and provides police with an emergency contact in case notification is needed.

- \$25 one-time registration fee; \$12 for senior citizens and individuals with permanent disabilities
- Alarm users are required to update their registration information within 30 days of a change to maintain the effectiveness of the program.

**ENHANCED CALL VERIFICATION:** Two calls are made by the alarm company to homeowners upon monitored alarm activation.

**ACCOUNTABILITY: False Alarm Fines** - \$100 for false burglar alarms and \$200 for false panic/hold up alarms.\*

\*The first-time monetary fine is waived if the alarm user takes an on-line alarm education class and passes.

**EDUCATION:** educating all alarm users on the functions of an alarm system and proper maintenance can help reduce false alarms.

### **ANNUAL UPDATE:**

After compiling public feedback, the City and PSC made a number of improvements to the program including clarifying the mailed notices from our vendor, easing the registration process, and creating partnerships within the alarm industry to ensure the program reflects the industry standards to best serve the Bellevue community. We continue to solicit ways to improve the program from alarm users.

To improve the program, the City Council approved amendments to the False Alarm Ordinance on July 13, 2016:

**One-time Registration Fee:** The annual renewal fee was removed from the ordinance and changed to a one-time registration fee.

**Definition of Alarm System:** The ordinance was changed to include unmonitored alarms, as well as alarms monitored by an alarm company, or any system intended to summon a law enforcement response. The law does not apply to motor vehicle or boat alarms, fire alarms, an alarm system designed solely to alert the occupants of a building/residence which will not emit

a signal either audible or visible from outside the building/residence, or alarms designed to elicit a medical response.

These amendments seek to hold all alarm users accountable for violations while removing any undue burden to those alarm users that operate and maintain systems that do not impact police resources.

The City of Bellevue saw a reduction of 971 false alarm activations in the first year of implementation, this is a 22% reduction. The City hopes to see a greater reduction in the coming years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ALARM CODE CHANGES GO TO:

<http://www.codepublishing.com/WA/Bellevue/?Bellevue09/Bellevue0916.html>