

Seattle Fire Prevention Division

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Preventable Fire Alarms or “False Alarms”

The Seattle Fire Department responds to over 5,000 false alarms every year -- roughly 1 in 3 fire calls received by the Seattle Fire Department are false alarms, many related to a lack of proper system maintenance. Preventable alarms take first responders and fire engines out of service for other emergency calls. The large number of false alarms reduces our ability to protect property and preserve lives for all who live, visit, and work in Seattle.

For this reason, Seattle is introducing a new citation penalty for “false” or preventable fire alarms. The intent is to encourage maintenance and needed modification of alarm systems and discourage careless acts that result in alarm activation. This in turn should increase the availability of fire department resources to respond to legitimate emergencies.

Preventable Alarms Include:

- Any activation of a fire alarm system that results in notification to SFD of an event of fire that leads to a response by SFD when no such danger exists.
- All activations when there is no fire, when such activations are caused by mechanical failure or malfunction due to insufficient or improper testing and maintenance, accidental activation, malicious activation, or misuse, by any person, including persons who sell, install, maintain, test, or monitor fire alarm systems.
- Does not include activations caused by weather conditions, telephone line problems, water surges, water hammers, or natural disasters.

Penalties and “Grace Period” There is no penalty for the first preventable alarm during a calendar year quarter, for a total of up to four waived alarm penalties each year for every building. Thereafter, penalties are \$373 for 2-5 violations in the same quarter of a calendar year, or \$746 for 6-8 violations in a quarter, or \$900 for 9 or more violations in a quarter. Citations will generally be written to the building owner.

Resources to Help You Reduce Preventable Alarms SFD has prepared information about the most frequent sources of preventable alarms and steps you can take to reduce them. Please see Client Assistance Memorandum [#5970](#) [“Preventable Fire Alarms or ‘False Alarms’”](#).

Appeals Preventable alarm citations may be appealed at a hearing in front of the City’s Hearing Examiner, if an appeals hearing is requested by writing within 15 days of the date the citation was served.

For more information, please contact us at SFD_FMO_SystemsTesting@seattle.gov. Thank you for your partnership with Seattle Fire in helping to preserve lives and protect property for all who live, visit, and do business in Seattle.