Fire Alarms: Silencing / Resetting

Fire Prevention Division

July 18, 2024

Intent: Provide information on when it may be appropriate to silence and/or reset a fire alarm system after activation.

Treat Every Alarm as an Emergency

In every instance, if the fire alarm sounds, all building staff and occupants should respond as though it is a real emergency. Refer to your building's Fire Safety Plan for emergency procedures, which should be readily accessible to all property owners/owner's agents. Fire alarm systems perform the crucial function of alerting occupants to a possible fire in the building. While false alarms can occur, it is essential to treat every alarm seriously and investigate the situation to determine if there is an emergency.

New Westminster Fire and Rescue Services (NWFRS) advises that silencing or resetting alarms should be done only after the fire department has arrived and assessed the situation.

Silencing or Acknowledging Alarms

Most fire alarm systems have a silencing or acknowledging ("ACK") feature. Activating this feature will disable the audible alarms, and they will NOT automatically re-initiate in an actual fire situation. They may only be re-initiated manually in most newer alarm systems. Premature silencing or acknowledging of alarm systems has resulted in fire-related fatalities. Due to this risk, you are reminded that liability could arise in any emergency where premature silencing or acknowledging leads to injury or death.

Resetting Alarm Systems

Resetting fire alarm systems will return it to normal operating status. In the event of an ongoing fire, the system will detect and sound the alarm again. In the case of a false alarm, resetting the system will silence the audible signal and return the panel to normal status. Important alarm panel information, such as the location of the issue, may be lost if it is not recorded before resetting. A faulty device responsible for a false alarm may not be located if the system has been reset. Continued operation of a faulty fire alarm system may generate subsequent false alarms. Excessive false alarms will result in fees charged to the building owner or occupant. Please refer to our Fire Protection Bylaw No. 6940, 2004 for the fee schedule.

NWFRS request that you do not reset the alarm system until after fire personnel have arrived. This will allow them to work with you to identify the location of the problem. Resetting a system before NWFRS arrives may delay and prolong firefighters' response. This can result in them being out of service and unable to respond to other emergencies for longer than necessary.

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