



Town of Lexington
Police Department

CHRISTOPHER CASEY
Chief of Police

TEL: (781) 862-1212
FAX: (781) 863-1291

Notice to Alarm Users –
The Alarm Regulations Have Changed

Written by: Captain Mark Corr
Lexington Police Department

On June 18, 2007 the Lexington Board of Selectmen unanimously approved revisions to the rules and regulations governing "*BURGLAR, HOLD-UP AND OTHER ALARMS FOR POLICE SERVICE*"; these changes are effective July 1, 2007.

Background. For many residents and business owners, alarms give them peace of mind that their property is protected. There are approximately 2,250 alarm systems in Lexington today. Since 1980, Lexington has had a bylaw authorizing the Board of Selectmen to make rules governing alarm installation and use.

In 1991, Lexington implemented an alarm service fee of \$50 for the third or subsequent false alarm. At that time, almost 22% of the police service calls involved alarms with 99.7% being false alarms. We found that it took a small percentage of alarm systems to generate the majority of the false alarms.

In 2006, only 111 or approximately 5% of the alarm owners were billed for three or more false alarms. These alarm systems were responsible for 695 false alarms. After one alarm fee, 51% did not have another false alarm. After the second alarm fee, an additional 22% did not have another false alarm. Only 30 alarm systems had 5 or more false alarms in the calendar year and most of these were commercial alarm systems.

What is a false alarm? It is any alarm where a responding officer(s), having completed a timely investigation of the alarm site, finds no reasonable evidence of a criminal offense. False alarms include avoidable alarms whereby the alarm activation caused by non-criminal behavior could have been avoided with simple preventative measures. Any alarm where there is a medical emergency or fire will not be handled as a "police" alarm regulated by this bylaw and is not subject to alarm service fees.

Why the change? The alarm service fee is not a fine; it is the real cost of dispatching officers to the scene of an alarm, investigating the origin of the alarm activation, and documenting the incident. The cost of doing business has increased since 1991. The alarm service fee will now be \$80 for a residential alarm and \$120 for non-residential and "high risk" alarm activations.

Where did our language come from? Since the origin of the alarm bylaw in 1980, the Police Department has seen or heard most issues that involve alarms. We then referenced the model burglar alarm ordinance drafted by the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association and the False Alarm Reduction Association and also spoke with several Massachusetts alarm company owners. We tried to identify reasonable language that built on our own successful program.

How do these changes affect Alarm Users?

- 1) **Alarm Registration** – Any alarm that may generate a call to the Police Department must be registered. A registration includes the alarm system address, phone number, and the name of the person/business responsible for the alarm. Since 1991, there has been an alarm registration requirement. The 2007 changes are intended to keep the registration process simple.

Alarm monitoring companies must also register alarm systems they intend to report to the police station when an alarm is activated. Alarm users **are excused** from having to register their alarm systems if their alarm company has done it for them. There is **no fee** for registering the alarms.

We are trying to avoid having thousands of individual alarm users registering their alarm systems each year. It is our experience that most alarm companies can easily generate a full list of their alarm systems and then mail this information to the Police Department.

- 2) **Cancellation of Police Response.** After a police officer is dispatched to investigate an alarm, it is possible to cancel the police response before an officer arrives and avoid a service fee. The person contacting the police station (this is usually the alarm company) **must be** the same person re-contacting the police station with information that makes a police response unnecessary.
- 3) **NO CANCELLATION of High Risk alarm response.** If a High Risk alarm is reported, this includes locations like banks, jewelry stores and gas stations and/or includes hold-up, panic and duress alarms, the Lexington Police Department **will not** cancel the police response.
- 4) **“High Risk” Alarms.** Our service fees are based on the level of service we provide. Many residential alarms require a lower police response with unoccupied dwellings and perimeter or motion alarms. We will be charging a higher fee for non-residential locations. “High Risk” alarms are those that are manually activated by a person and suggest that there is an immediate threat. The priority police response to High Risk alarms will be subject to the higher service fee, whether or not the location is a business or residence. Alarm users may wish to review the terminology they or their Alarm Company use when reporting an alarm.

- 5) **Which Alarm Company should you use?** The Police Department will not recommend any particular company. However, these regulations are recognized by most credible agencies as being consistent with local trends and model policies. Your alarm company should be willing to offer training, maintenance, installation and registration services.

The high incidence of false alarms throughout the United States is changing the way law enforcement authorities are responding. One trend nationally is alarm verification where a private company confirms that the alarm is not false prior to contacting the police. Alarm registration fees and fines are also common.

Lexington has been relatively successful reducing false alarms since 1991. Shifting the cost of false alarms to the few alarm users responsible for these alarms is good public policy. This program encourages alarm users to become familiar with how to use their alarm system, provide the proper maintenance, and where necessary, upgrade or replace faulty systems.

The [alarm bylaw](#) is posted on the Police Department's website www.lexingtonpolice.org and questions may be sent to policeinfo@ci.lexington.ma.us. Telephone inquiries can be directed to the Alarm Officer Kristen French at 781-862-1212 Monday through Friday between 8:00 –3:30.