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| **Unwanted Fire Signals policy** | |
| The purpose of this policy is to explain the methodology and procedures to reduce the occurrence of unwanted fire signals and associated unnecessary appliance movements, and to ensure attendance is managed on a risk appropriate basis. | |
| **OWNER** | Head of Protection |
| **LAST REVIEW** | January 2023 |
| **REVIEW DUE DATE** | 12 months |
| **VERSION CONTROL** | Controlled by Corp Docs |
| **OTHER (CROSS) REFERENCES:**  N/A | |

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**PART 1 - POLICY SECTION**

**Introduction**

* 1. **Definition of an Unwanted Fire Signal**

An Unwanted Fire Signal (UwFS) is defined by the British Fire Protection System Association as “any alarm signal other than a genuine fire or test signal”. Any false alarm which is subsequently passed to the fire and rescue service is classed as an “Unwanted Fire Signal”.

* 1. **Scope of Policy**

It is widely recognised that the installation of modern fire safety management systems and the increasing use of Automatic Fire Detection

(AFD) systems, provides the earliest possible warning of fire. They are a key factor in providing an early warning of fire for building occupants. The occurrence of UwFS do however, have a significant impact on fire and rescue service resources, an issue which is addressed through the procedures detailed in this policy.

The purpose of the UwFS policy is to:

* 1. Reduce the number of false alarm activations generated by fire detection and fire alarm systems;
  2. Deliver significant reductions in appliance movements, unnecessary cost expenditure and disruption to both Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) and the business community; and
  3. Reduce the risk to the public and firefighters through unnecessary emergency responses.

**Impact of Unwanted Fire Signals**

**2.1** The Service attends hundreds of UwFSs every year from premises with AFD systems. On average only 1.8% are found on arrival to be confirmed fires, with less than 1% requiring firefighting action by the Service. Mobilising appliances to each of these calls causes a significant impact on the Service for the following reasons:

* Fire appliances are not available to respond to genuine life threatening emergencies.
* Responding to UwFS under blue-light conditions poses an unnecessary risk to staff and other road users.
* Operational crews are disrupted whilst undertaking other core tasks such as training and community safety activities.
* Financial costs are incurred for fuel and there is an associated impact on the environment caused by the appliance movements.
* On-Call firefighters require payment for being alerted and are unnecessarily disrupted from their primary employment.

**Call Challenging and Mobilising**

**3.1** On occasions when Automatic Fire alarm (AFA) calls are received by the Service, Northwest Fire Control (NWFC) will adopt a call challenging procedure as detailed below and in Appendices 1-3 of the policy. The call challenge process is designed to enhance the quantity and quality of information regarding the situation, allowing the Fire Control Operator to mobilise the most appropriate operational response, in most circumstances, only when confirmation of a fire can be given by the caller.

3.1.1Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week there is no automatic attendance to non-sleeping risk premises, unless the caller is at the building and reasonably believes a fire has broken out. High rise buildings and those industrial sites which are licensed under either the COMAH Regulations 1999 or REPPIR Regulations 2001 are excluded due to their unique off-site risk.

**3.2** Due to the nature of premises which contain persons who may be asleep or bedridden, the call challenge procedure will not apply to any sleeping risk premises (sleeping risk premises are detailed in appendix 4) and these premises will continue to receive an emergency attendance.

**3.3** Whilst the process should be adhered to as a form of structured guidance, the Duty Control Manager will at all times retain the discretion to vary the attendance based on the information available to them at the time.

**3.4 Calls Received from Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) (Appendix 1)**

3.4.1 It will, upon occurrence of an alarm signal, be the role of the ARCs to make contact with the premises and confirm if a fire exists, prior to informing NWFC. This will in most situations ensure the Service is not needlessly informed of UwFS calls to which no response is required.

3.4.2 There will however be occasions whereby this procedure is not followed and calls reporting AFA signals will be received from ARCs. In these circumstances the following ‘call challenge’ should be applied.

3.4.3 In the case that calls are received from ARCs which have not completed a ‘call back’ to the premises, the ARC should be asked to make a ‘call back’ and advise the premises to ring 999 should they discover a fire. If the ARC is uncooperative and refuses to undertake a ‘call back’, they should be informed that the Service will not be attending and the procedures in Section 4.4 followed.

3.4.4 If a call is received from an ARC which has not been able to make

contact with anybody at the premises, they should be informed that the Service will not be attending and the procedures in Section 4.4 followed.

**3.5 Calls Received Directly from Occupiers (Appendix 2)**

3.5.1 The occupier will be asked to confirm if there is a fire. If it is confirmed, the full PDA will be mobilised for the premises.

3.5.2 Where the caller cannot confirm the cause of the alarm, they will be asked to investigate and are to be advised that “**No response will be made by the fire and rescue service unless you are able to confirm there is a fire**”. Callers must be informed that should they discover a fire they should immediately ring 999 to enable an emergency response to be mobilised.

**3.6 Calls Received from a Passer-by (Appendix 3)**

3.6.1 On occasions where calls are received from a passer-by to report a fire alarm sounding, the PDA for an AFA will be mobilised. Callers should not be challenged to attempt an investigation as they are unable to represent the Responsible Person and do not have knowledge of the premises fire safety management systems.

3.6.2 The caller should also be asked if there are any additional signs of fire (e.g. smell of burning, smoke issuing), allowing the Fire Control Operator to mobilise the full PDA if appropriate.

**3.7 Calls Received from Auto-Dial Systems**

3.7.1 When calls are received from Auto-Dial systems and a contactable telephone number is available, the Fire Control Operator should return the call and advise the premises that “**No response will be made by the fire and rescue service unless you are able to confirm there is a fire**”. The premises must be informed that should they discover a fire they should immediately ring 999 to enable an emergency response to be mobilised.

**3.8 Subsequent Calls Providing Additional Information**

In the circumstances that an appliance is mobile to an AFA call and further information is received to indicate that this is a confirmed false alarm, the attendance should be cancelled.

**Agreements with ARCs**

**4.1** In order to facilitate the call challenging approach, close co-operation will be required between the Service and the various ARCs which monitor premises across the Service area. For the purposes of this policy, the term ARC is inclusive of all Telecare Service Providers who have responsibilities for monitoring domestic premises and passing alarm calls to the Service.

**4.2** Historically, the Service had developed an ‘Example Agreement’ to which all ARCs will be required to conform to in order to continue receiving an appropriate response from the Service to alarm activations in their client’s premises. This Agreement has been removed as it was not used.

**4.3** The Unitary area offices for Protection are the first point of contact for queries from NWFC and ARCs and if further review or advice is required surrounding the implementation of the policy this will be facilitated by the HQ Protection Team and the Group Manager for Protection.

**4.4** It is expected that on occasions issues will be experienced whereby ARCs do not conform to the requirements expected of them which may lead to difficulty in applying this policy during the call handling process. In these circumstances NWFC Ops support will email details of these issues to the relevant Unitary Protection office who will contact the responsible person for the premises so that they can liaise with the ARC.

**Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) to AFA Calls**

**5.1** For AFAs the appropriate PDA will be mobilised by Northwest Fire Control (NWFC).

**5.2** In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to increase the PDA for an AFA. Such premises would initially be identified by operational crews through the SSRI process or by Fire Safety Inspecting Officers who will complete a premises flagging request form and follow the approval process detailed on the form. Authorised increases in PDA’s apply only on a temporary basis and must also be one of the property types identified as a sleeping risk process (e.g. a hospital undergoing major construction work).

**5.3** Following approval of a PDA increase, locally based Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will make contact with the premises and develop a specific action plan to improve the premises’ fire safety management systems and return the premises to the standard PDA and notify NWFC of the return to the normal PDA

**Monitoring and Enforcing Premises**

**6.1** Whilst the ‘call challenge’ process will reduce the number of UwFS calls attended, some premises may continue to have an unacceptably high number of activations (the call challenge is not applied to sleeping risk premises).

**6.2** In order to target problem premises the Service monitors response to AFA calls and action by the relevant department is based on the number of UwFS previously attended at the premises within a set time period.

**6.3** For the purposes of monitoring and enforcing premises on complex sites with multiple occupiers, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers should seek guidance from their local Protection Station Manager who will advise on the application of this policy.

**6.4** Hospitals

UWFS in hospitals are managed in accordance with separate legislation namely;

* Health Technical Memorandum (HTM) 05-03: Operational provisions Part H – Reducing false alarms in healthcare premises.

The system of management and monitoring consists of;

* Internally - monitoring and recording all hospital UWFS monthly.
* Externally – Receiving monthly/quarterly/annual reports and attending face to face meetings with health trust fire safety managers.

In order to target UWFS Protection Officers will look at all fire alarm activations and work with the Health Trusts to achieve reductions. The Protection offices will regularly meet with the respective persons in healthcare premises to discuss and address any issue highlighted.

Recording of UWFS statistics, minutes of meetings and improvement outcomes are generally stored within Protection local office T: Drives.

**6.5**

**For every UwFS call that the Service has attended and appears on Fire Core:**

**Find these incidents by opening Fire Core:**

* **Clicking on the Performance tab**
* **Under Manage Incidents and Targets tab**
* **Click on Manage BV149i**
* **Click on drop down arrow next to Station tab and press ‘Group By This Field’**
* **UwFS for each Station area will now be displayed.**

**The lead for UwFS in the Unitary Offices will:**

* **Make contact with the premises to investigate and determine the cause of the alarm and provide advice as required.**
* **Record this meeting on SAFFIRE as an ‘Unwanted Fire Signals job’ with job notes attached of the information obtained.**
* **Make contact with the Officer in Charge of the incident to gather further information and discuss (if required) the IRS information.**
* **Fire Safety Inspectors can seek further advice from their local Protection Station Manager if they are not happy with the premises actions.**
* **Following a discussion and agreement from their local Protection Station Manager Fire Safety Inspectors can email** [**Fire.Research.and.Analysis@cheshire.police.uk**](mailto:Fire.Research.and.Analysis@cheshire.police.uk) **if it is agreed the wrong type of premises has been captured on the IRS and needs to be updated.**

**Premises with sleeping risks**

If the Service responds to 2 or more UwFS in a rolling 28 day period, for affected premises that are sleeping risks following actions will be taken:

* A Fire Safety Inspecting Officer will make contact with the premises to investigate the cause of the alarm and must consider providing an action plan in order to assist in reductions.
* In the case of sleeping risk premises, a full Fire Safety Audit will be undertaken if one has not been completed in the previous 12 months.
* The Service will continue to apply the same call challenging policies to the property and respond as appropriate.

**For all other premises**

In the event of a CFRS attendance at a commercial premises without a sleeping risk, the following process should be followed for all cases. This is to determine why we have attended outside of policy.

* Scrutiny of incident information using Fire Core and INET viewer electronic database. (Each Watch Manager in the Unitary area has a log in for INET).
* Contact premises RP for discussion about UWFS and the policy for attendance at non sleeping risks.
* Ask RP to speak with ARC to confirm that premises is not incorrectly recorded as a sleeping risk and amend if required.
* Where no reason for the attendance can be ascertained then it should be referred to the NWFC SPOC.
* Record actions on SAFFIRE as an ‘Unwanted Fire Signals job’ with job notes attached of information obtained.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

**7.1** **Fire Control**

To receive calls and use these procedures to apply a ‘call challenge’ as detailed in Appendices 1-4 of this policy.

NWFC will retain responsibility for updating the mobilising system with information relating to specific premises which will assist in the call challenge and enforcement process.

To assist in the monitoring and enforcement process, Control staff will ensure that where possible a specific address is taken during the call handling process. This is particularly important on large sites with multiple occupiers which are often classified as one premises for mobilising purposes.

Where ARCs do not comply with the requirements of the standard agreement, Control staff will inform the relevant Protection Unitary area office.

The Duty Control Manager will monitor the application of this policy by Fire Control Operators and support them in the decision making process.

The Duty Control Manager will at all times retain the discretion to adapt the mobilised attendance based on information available to them through the call handling process.

**7.3** **Operational Crews and Incident Commanders**

Operational crews will attend AFA calls to which they are mobilised and

identify whether the alarm has been caused by an UwFS. The cause will be thoroughly investigated and communicated to the occupier to ensure all reasonable measures are implemented to prevent a re-occurrence.

In order to accurately record and analyse data relating to UwFS attendances, Incident Commanders should ensure that an accurate address, contact name, cause and location within the building is obtained.

**7.4** **Station Managers**

The Protection Station Manager in each Unitary area will have responsibility for ensuring the policy is implemented efficiently across their office and will be the first point of contact for the team who have queries regarding its application.

Protection Station Manager for each Unitary area ensure their team monitor the overall performance of the policy in delivering a reduced number of calls and report back to the HQ Team on the need for adaptation or changes to the policy.

**7.5** **Fire Safety Inspecting Officers**

In accordance with the approach outlined in Section 6, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will monitor the number of UwFS calls received from premises in their Unitary area and take the action described including site visits and action planning for problem premises. Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will, in discussion with their line manager, also be responsible for considering the use of enforcement action.

Where premises have been granted an increase in the Pre-determined Attendance for AFA calls, the relevant Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will be responsible, as outlined in Section 5, for developing specific guidance to improve fire safety at the premises and reduce the PDA accordingly.

To ensure accurate application of this policy, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers must ensure that they confirm the accuracy of addresses where we have attended UwFSs, particularly on complex sites with multiple occupiers.

**7.6 Business Safety Manager**

The Business Safety Manager will work closely with Corporate Communications to deliver a communications strategy which informs both Service employees, Cheshire premises and any other relevant stakeholders affected by the policy.

**APPENDIX 1 – Call Handling Flowchart - Calls Received from ARCs**

INFORM ARC THAT NO RESPONSE WILL BE MADE UNLESS THE FIRE IS CONFIRMED

MOBILISE AFA PDA

YES

NO

IS PREMISES A SLEEPING RISK/EXEMPTED (AS IN APPENDIX 6)

ALARM SIGNAL ONLY

PREMISES STATE CONFIRMED FIRE

MOBILISE FULL PDA

NO ATTENDANCE MADE

INFORM ARC THAT NO RESPONSE WILL BE MADE UNLESS FIRE IS CONFIRMED

CONFIRMED

FALSE ALARM

CONFIRMED

FIRE

ARC UNABLE TO MAKE CONTACT WITH

PREMISES

NOT FOLLOWED STANDARD AGREEMENT

WHY?

YES

NO

HAS THE ARC

INVESTIGATED THE CAUSE OF ALARM?

WHY DO YOU NEED CHESHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE?

**APPENDIX 2 – Call Handling Flowchart - Calls Directly from Occupiers**

WHY DO YOU NEED CHESHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE?

INFORM OCCUPIER THAT NO RESPONSE WILL BE MADE UNLESS FIRE IS CONFIRMED

ADVISE RING 999 IF FIRE CONFIRMED

ALARM SOUNDING ONLY

CONFIRMED FIRE

IS PREMISES A SLEEPING RISK/EXEMPTED (AS IN APPENDIX 6)

YES

NOT AWARE OF FIRE SERVICE POLICY

MOBILISE AFA PDA

NO

HAS THE OCCUPIER

INVESTIGATED THE CAUSE OF ALARM?

WHY?

YES

NO

OUTCOME?

CONFIRMED

FALSE ALARM

CONFIRMED

FIRE

REFUSING/UNABLE TO

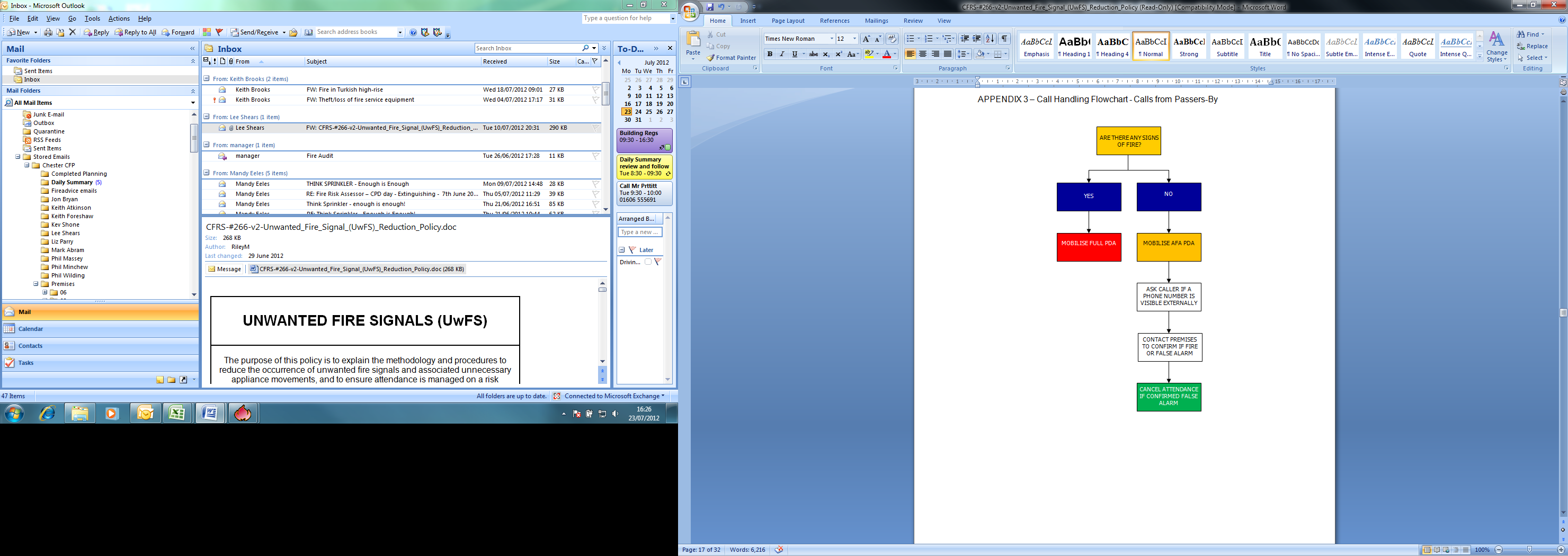
INVESTIGATE CAUSE

NO ATTENDANCE MADE

INFORM ARC THAT NO RESPONSE WILL BE MADE UNLESS THE FIRE IS CONFIRMED

MOBILISE FULL PDA

**APPENDIX 3 – Call Handling Flowchart - Calls from Passer-by**



**APPENDIX 4 – List of sleeping risk/exempt premises**

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| Boarding House/B&B for homeless/asylum seekers |
| Boarding House/B&B other |
| Boarding School accommodation |
| Children's Home |
| COMAH Sites and REPPIR sites |
| Domestic Premises |
| High-Rise Buildings |
| Hospital |
| Hostel (e.g. for homeless people) |
| Hotel/motel |
| Nurses'/Doctors' accommodation |
| Nursing/Care Residential Home |
| Other holiday residence (cottage, flat, chalet) |
| Other Residential Home |
| Prison |
| Retirement |
| Student Hall of Residence |
| Young offenders unit |
| Youth hostel |