



AWEW/mjc/NSI001/12

10 April 2012

To: All NSI ARC Gold approved companies

Dear Colleague

FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES CHARGING FOR ATTENDING FALSE ALARMS

The Fire Industry Association (FIA) has approached us regarding the possibility that Fire & Rescue Services may start charging alarm receiving centres (ARCs) for attending false alarms. This has become possible due to a recent change in the law. We have agreed to co-operate with the FIA on this issue and I enclose a copy of a letter from the FIA providing you with further information about the situation.

The spreadsheet on the second page of the FIA letter gives details about the levels of response currently provided by the Fire & Rescue Services and you can obtain a clear copy of the spreadsheet from the FIA if you wish to do so. False alarms are a problem for the Fire & Rescue Services and some of them have effectively pulled out of responding already.

We appreciate that ARCs already do much to filter out false alarms and are not responsible for originating these alarms in the first place. However, the ARCs are in the front line in terms of passing the alarms on to the Fire & Rescue Services. The FIA would like to set up a working group to see what can be achieved to reduce false alarms and you are welcome to participate.

It is important for fire alarms to remain on response and therefore we encourage you to make a contribution. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to do so. I am very keen to hear your suggestions for improving the situation.

Yours sincerely

Tony Weeks
Head of Technical Services

Enc. Letter from Fire Industry Association dated 30 March 2012

Alarm Receiving Centres

30th March 2012

Fire & Rescue Services charging for false alarm attendance

Dear sirs,

On 17th February 2012 Eric Pickles fast tracked part of the Localism Bill (General Powers of Competence and freedom to pray) in response to the High Court case brought against Bideford Town Council banning the practices of prayers at the formal beginning of council meetings.

Unfortunately this part of the Bill includes the power for Fire & Rescue Services to charge for attendance of false alarms following a local consultation. We were expecting this to come into existence after April 2012 and so far it has caught Fire & Rescue Services (FRS), and us all, off guard.

The Fire Industry Association (FIA) have been lobbying and working hard to firstly fight this move and subsequently try and ensure the definitions used in the Localism Bill are understood ("it must be clear what the Government consider to be a false call, as opposed to a malicious or hoax call, and what is considered to be malfunctioning equipment." Baroness Smith) . We have been in constant contact with the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Fire Minister, Bob Neill, CFOA etc. and including a few Lords, when the Bill was read in the House of Lords.

We have warned that these powers have not been properly thought through and that there are definitions that clearly need to be understood. We have also advised that ARCs should not be the ones who are sent invoices for the false alarm charge. It is our fear that this is what will happen because this was the route for such charges before the court case many years ago which stopped the charging powers in place at that time.

Of the ARCs we have spoken to, alongside our friends at BSIA, we understand that ARCs may pull out of the fire market should they start to see significant bills for false alarms. This would be disastrous for fire safety as well as the fire detection & alarm industry.

Please can you contact me immediately if/when you receive your first invoice so that we can start to collate the details and act as a central point on this issue.

Rather than see FRS adopt this agreed best practice we have seen the complete opposite with 29 English FRS operating completely different policies.

We would welcome your comments and we would like to launch a working group of ARCs to look at this issue and see what can be achieved to help resolve 'unwanted fire signals', again please email me if you wish to participate in this working group.

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