



R B F & R S

news release

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NEW MEASURES TO REDUCE FALSE ALARMS

Responding to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) that turn out to be false alarms costs Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) more than £150,000 a year.

Last year in Berkshire, 92% - 3275 - of the calls to AFAs received by RBFRS were unwanted fire signals, or false alarms. The majority of AFAs generated in error are caused by a system fault of some kind. This can be due to malicious action, equipment failure, atmospheric or climatic conditions, or inadequate maintenance and management of the system.

RBFRS Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Olaf Baars, said: "The time has come to take definitive action. We have been working with the occupiers of non-domestic premises, that generate a high number of unwanted fire signals, over the past three years. Whilst this has had some effect, the scale of the overall problem is on the increase.

"When our emergency Control Room receives a call generated by an AFA, the occupier of the premises will be required to confirm whether there is a fire. If so, an emergency response will be sent. If the occupier cannot be contacted, if there is no competent person on the premises to check, or if the premises is unoccupied, then a response will be sent. The Control Room will always have discretion to mobilise a response immediately if there is any uncertainty from the caller.

"It is not just the financial cost of these calls that has an impact. False alarms divert fire crews from genuine emergencies, cause unnecessary risk to firefighters and the public when responding, disrupt our training and operational preparation and community safety activities.

"Occupiers have a statutory duty to ensure that they maintain an effective alarm system. We will be contacting every premises with an AFA system to make them aware of the policy and to remind them of their legal responsibilities. We want to work with occupiers in implementing these changes, which will take effect from 1 April."

Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority agreed the measures at a meeting yesterday (13 February).

ENDS.

Notes for Editors:

In 2004, the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) produced a paper, outlining the problem and setting out a number of recommendations for reducing the scale of the problem nationally. It is expected to issue national guidance shortly on call challenge procedures for unwanted fire signals.

RBFRS based its policy upon the CFOA research, together with national guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The policy is designed to reduce the number of unwanted alarm activations in Berkshire. It follows a three-year programme to drive down the number of false alarms. This entailed working closely with the owners and occupiers of premises with a history of frequent false alarm activations, including commercial premises, hospitals, colleges, hotels and office buildings.