



# Unwanted Fire Signals: Advice for Businesses and Occupiers

**Royal Berkshire Fire  
and Rescue Service**

# Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS): Advice for Businesses and Occupiers

A well-maintained fire alarm system is essential for workplace safety. However, frequent Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) can be disruptive, costly, and strain valuable resources. This guide offers you advice to identify and address common causes of UwFS, promoting a safer and more efficient environment.

## Understanding UwFS

UwFS occur when a fire alarm activates due to factors other than a real fire. This triggers an emergency response from RBFRS, leading to wasted resources and potential business disruption. The financial impact of UwFS can be significant, including fire service call out charges and lost productivity during evacuations. Additionally, frequent false alarms can erode occupant confidence in the system, potentially delaying response to a real fire emergency.



In this document we outline three major causes of UwFS and the steps you can take to reduce them.





## Human Error and Activity

### Accidental Activation:


Break-glass call points are susceptible to accidental damage, especially in high-traffic areas or by untrained personnel. Consider:

-  Relocating them to areas with less foot traffic or accidental contact.
-  Implementing protective covers where appropriate to deter accidental breakage.

### Testing and Maintenance:




-  Ensure clear communication with your Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) before system testing to avoid dispatching emergency services unnecessarily.
-  Schedule regular preventative maintenance by a qualified engineer following BS 5839 standards. This ensures timely identification and rectification of minor issues before they escalate into UwFS.

### Smoking:

-  Smoking is strictly prohibited in all enclosed workplaces. Enforce a clear no-smoking policy and display prominent signage throughout your premises.

### Cooking Activities:

Cooking fumes are a persistent cause of false alarms, particularly in busy kitchens or restaurants. Implement strategies such as:



-  Installing and maintaining proper ventilation systems to effectively remove smoke and grease particles from the cooking area.
-  Educating staff on proper cooking practices to minimise smoke generation, such as avoiding unattended cooking or using appropriate heat settings.
-  Consider installing heat detectors in kitchens as an alternative to smoke detectors, as they are less susceptible to false alarms triggered by cooking fumes.







## System-Related Issues

**Maintenance Deficiencies:** A poorly maintained fire alarm system is more likely to experience malfunctions and false alarms. Here's how to ensure proper upkeep:

-  Regularly clean detector heads and maintain the system as per BS 5839 standards. Dust buildup or cobwebs can hinder a detector's ability to function correctly.
-  Maintain fire safety logbooks with detailed maintenance records readily available for inspection by RBFRS officers. These records demonstrate your commitment to fire safety and can help identify recurring issues.



### Faulty Equipment:

Malfunctioning detectors, call points, or control panels can contribute to UwFS. Here's what to do:

-  Replace malfunctioning detectors and call points promptly. Faulty equipment can compromise the entire system's reliability.
-  Investigate the cause of system faults and address them immediately. Ignoring system faults can lead to recurring UwFS and potential safety hazards.

### Incorrect Detector Placement:

The effectiveness of your fire alarm system relies on strategically positioned detectors. Here's what to consider:

-  Ensure detectors are the appropriate type for the protected area. For example, heat detectors are better suited for kitchens than smoke detectors.
-  Position detectors strategically to ensure adequate coverage of the entire space, following BS 5839 guidelines.



## Environmental Contaminants

**Insect Activity:** During peak insect seasons, particularly thrips infestations in summer, insects can trigger false alarms by entering detector chambers. Consider using pet flea collars or citronella oil around detectors as deterrents.

**Steam Emissions:** Steam from kettles, showers, or industrial processes can activate smoke detectors. Here are some solutions:



Relocate detectors away from potential steam sources, especially in kitchens or bathrooms.



Designate specific areas for using steam-generating equipment to minimize the risk of accidental activation in areas with smoke detectors.

**Aerosol Sprays:** Aerosol sprays, such as air fresheners, hairsprays, or insect repellents, can release airborne particles that trigger smoke detectors. Here's how to minimize the risk:



Restrict the use of aerosols in areas with smoke detectors.



Explore alternative air fresheners and insect repellents that don't rely on aerosol sprays.

**Dust Buildup:** Dust buildup can hinder a detector's ability to function correctly. By following the guidance in this brochure and working collaboratively with RBFRS, you can significantly reduce UwFS at your premises. Remember, a well-maintained fire alarm system with minimized false alarms translates to:



Enhanced safety: Reduced risk of complacency and delayed response to real fire emergencies.



Improved business continuity: Minimized disruptions caused by unnecessary evacuations.



Reduced costs: Lower fire service call out charges and improved productivity.



## 10 Step Checklist for Reducing Unwanted Fire Signals

1. Break-glass call points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relocate them to areas with less traffic if possible.</li> <li>Consider protective covers to deter accidental breakage.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Testing and Maintenance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform your Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) before system testing to avoid triggering unnecessary responses.</li> <li>Schedule regular preventative maintenance by a qualified engineer following BS 5839 standards.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Smoking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enforce a clear no-smoking/vaping policy and display prominent signage.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Cooking Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain proper ventilation systems to remove smoke and grease particles.</li> <li>Educate staff on proper cooking practices to minimize smoke generation.</li> <li>Consider heat detectors in kitchens as an alternative to smoke detectors.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Maintenance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean detector heads regularly and maintain the system as per BS 5839 standards.</li> <li>Maintain fire safety logbooks with detailed maintenance records.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Faulty Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace malfunctioning detectors and call points promptly.</li> <li>Investigate and address the cause of system faults immediately.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Detector Placement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure detectors are the appropriate type for the area (e.g., heat detectors in kitchens).</li> <li>Position detectors strategically following BS 5839 guidelines for full coverage.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Insect Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider using pet flea collars or citronella oil around detectors as deterrents (during peak insect seasons).</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Aerosol Sprays and Steam: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restrict the use of aerosols in areas with smoke detectors.</li> <li>Explore alternative air fresheners and insect repellents.</li> <li>Relocate detectors away from potential steam sources (kitchens, bathrooms).</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
10. Dust Buildup: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain good housekeeping practices to minimise dust accumulation.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## **For Further Information and Support**

Fire safety matters are centrally managed from our Headquarters at Newsham Court in Calcot and locally managed at offices around the county. Officers visit and audit premises throughout Berkshire.

Our offices are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Contact can be made out of hours via our reception on 0118 945 2888. An answerphone system is also available at each of our fire safety offices.

When a fire safety complaint is registered, the person taking the information will fill out a complaint form. This form can be downloaded from our website (rbfrs.co.uk) to help familiarise yourself with the process.

### **Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead (East hub)**

Maidenhead Fire Station, Bridge Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 8PG

[easthubfiresafety@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:easthubfiresafety@rbfrs.co.uk)

### **Wokingham and Bracknell (Central hub)**

Wokingham Fire Station, 11-13 Easthampstead Road, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG40 2EH

[centralhubfiresafety@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:centralhubfiresafety@rbfrs.co.uk)

### **Reading and West Berkshire (West hub)**

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Berkshire, RG31 7SD

[westhubfiresafety@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:westhubfiresafety@rbfrs.co.uk)



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