



## **Changes to Fire and Rescue Service response to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs)**

**Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) has reviewed its response to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) call-outs as around 95% of these turn out to be false alarms.**

Over a third of the 8,000 callouts the Service receives each year are to AFAs, and crews lose an estimated 4,000 hours attending these false alarms. HWFRS have attended over 6,000 incidents from AFAs in the last two years, resulting in over 7,000 vehicle mobilisations with associated financial and capacity costs. False alarms caused by AFAs also divert essential services from real emergencies, potentially putting life and property at risk.

There are many tangible benefits to a reduction in attendances by Service personnel to AFA activations. By reducing attendance at AFAs the risk to the public and firefighters during emergency response will be reduced. Reduced AFA attendances will also enable more resources to remain available for **confirmed emergency calls**. Capacity that is freed from these AFA attendances can be utilised to deliver community safety activities, training, or maintaining equipment in readiness for emergencies.

Recommendations for change have been balanced against community and business risk.

Calls to AFAs are rarely the same as calls to fires. By changing the way the Service deals with AFAs in the future, a significant and unnecessary burden will be released from both the workload of our frontline firefighters and associated fire appliances, whilst also realising revenue savings.

Mobilisation to certain types of premises will need to continue based on professional judgement and evidence. This is due to the link between certain types of premises and national fire death and injury statistics. Other premises types have a legal responsibility to maintain and manage their alarm systems appropriately, and to this end HWFRS may choose not to attend these premises until a fire can be confirmed. HWFRS will also choose to look at time of day recommendations where attendance is aligned to day or night risk activities.

The number of fire appliances sent to an AFA – the Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) – will be reduced to minimise the number of vehicle movements in total.

Reducing PDAs for AFA incidents to one appliance will also maintain

fire cover for other emergencies in the two-appliance (or three appliance) station areas, resulting in fewer cover moves being made from neighbouring fire stations. Reducing the carbon footprint will also assist HWFRS with its environmental/fuel efficiency strategy (IRMP Action Plan Recommendation 7).

Retained and Day Crewed (otherwise known as RDS or “on call”) staff often provide a crew for the second pump in wholetime station areas, where the majority of AFA/unwanted fire signals occur. As well as financial return in relation to reduced turn out costs for RDS, an associated benefit will be that employers of RDS staff in the community will not lose their workforce on a regular and unnecessary basis.

Reducing attendances or not attending AFAs during the day, for example, will also demonstrate a common sense approach. Most premises will have someone available to investigate the cause of the alarm, who can then confirm if a fire has occurred during the day time. HWFRS will then be able to respond to a confirmed fire, not just an alarm sounding, and send the appropriate number of firefighters and fire appliances immediately, confident that there is a real incident to deal with.

#### **Premises with AFA systems may be affected as follows:-**

- In certain premises, e.g. residential care homes and hotels, where an attendance is made to an AFA, this will be with one fire appliance. Where a fire is confirmed via a 999 call a full emergency response will be mobilised;
- In other premises e.g. non residential, HWFRS will only attend where the occupier has confirmed signs of a fire via a 999 call where a full emergency response will be mobilised.

#### **In order to achieve this, the following may be carried out:-**

- Where calls are received as a result of AFAs at low risk premises, e.g. offices and shops, Fire Control Operators may request further information and the occupier may be requested to investigate further (without putting themselves or others at risk), as to the cause of the alarm;
- Fire appliances will be returned en-route when the caller confirms a false alarm;
- Most responses to AFAs will be at normal road speeds to reduce risk to other road users;
- AFAs at unoccupied premises will not normally be attended unless a fire is confirmed.

**The framework for these changes is outlined below in recommendations approved by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority;**

***Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) and Mobilising***

**Recommendation 1**

All Pre-Determined Attendances to AFA calls to be one appliance only except where risk factors and Intel information indicate otherwise.

**Recommendation 2**

Implement robust call filtering in Control to ensure that persons calling in response to alarm actuations at lower risk premises are requested to investigate further the cause of the alarm (see Recommendation 8).

**Recommendation 3**

Implement return en route as a policy, when a caller confirms any previous call as now a false alarm. This could be applied to all incident types

**Recommendation 4**

All responses to AFAs to be at normal road speeds unless the Officer in Charge of the appliance deems otherwise.

***Premises Type (Risk Categorisation)***

**Recommendation 5**

Attendance at:

- ***Dwellings*** (includes houses in multiple occupation, flats) ***schools, residential care*** and ***other residential*** (includes special units, sheltered housing, hotels, hostels).

Non attendance at:

- ***Hospitals*** and ***non residential*** (includes offices, shops, factories, warehouses, other buildings).

***Time of day considerations***

**Recommendation 6**

As well as the restriction on the types of premises that the Service attends as identified within Recommendation 5 (Premises Type), the Service can add further restrictions on FRS attendance based on the time of day. It is recommended that this is considered for implementation after a 12 month review of the adopted changes.

***Unoccupied premises***

**Recommendation 7**

Do not attend unoccupied premises. Key holder to investigate and ring 999 if signs of fire discovered, unless identified as a specific risk through the Intel process.

### ***Call filtering***

#### **Recommendation 8**

Apply full filter procedure to AFA calls from non-residential premises and hospitals. This complements Recommendation 5.

Apply light filter procedure to AFA calls from dwellings, schools, residential care and other residential properties. This complements Recommendation 5.

### ***Repeat offenders***

#### **Recommendation 9**

No attendance to be made to repeat offenders, following Technical Fire Safety intervention, unless a confirmed fire is reported.

### ***Cost recovery***

#### **Recommendation 10**

The Authority will not adopt a 'Charging for AFA' policy.

The Authority will no longer attend repeat offenders' premises in preference to charging (see Recommendation 9).

**Should you have any queries or wish to make any comment in relation to these changes, these should be sent via e-mail to [afaconsultation@hwfire.org.uk](mailto:afaconsultation@hwfire.org.uk). Closing date for receipt of comments will be 5pm Friday 11 November 2011.**

Fire safety advice for business may be obtained 9am-5pm Monday to Friday by calling FREEPHONE 0800 032 1155.