



ACT
Government



Automatic Fire Alarms - Fees and Charges

Disallowable instrument, DI2019-90. Instrument commences 1 July 2019.

Automatic Fire Alarms

ACT Fire & Rescue is committed to reducing the number of unwanted false alarms from Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems. Unwanted alarms are when ACTF&R has attended in response to an alarm where there is no fire or other emergency. ACTF&R has a statutory obligation under the Emergencies Act 2004 to attend to all fire alarms.

ACTF&R responded to 5357 AFAs in 2018/19. 4500 of these alarms were chargeable, 51.6% of all ACTF&R responses were to AFAs.

Unwanted alarms create complacency towards genuine alarms which can result in serious injury or loss of life. They also divert ACTF&R resources that would otherwise be available for genuine emergencies.

AFA systems are a crucial component in fire detection for buildings and are designed to alert occupants and initiate quick responses by ACTF&R in the case of fires. AFA systems are required under building legislation, as prescribed by the National Construction Code (NCC), Building Code of Australia (BCA).

It is important that building owners and managers properly manage and maintain their AFA systems to ensure their correct operation and to reduce the likelihood of unwanted alarms.

The AFA systems that require monitoring are to be connected to an approved Automatic Fire Alarm Service Provider (AFASP).

Charges for false alarms

The Emergencies Act 2004 Section 201 (Determination of fees) allows ACTF&R to charge for attending false alarm call-outs to monitored AFA systems. This charge is intended to motivate building owners and managers to be continually pro-active in managing their AFA systems and to ensure that they are properly maintained. It has been demonstrated that properly maintained systems assist in reducing the number of false alarms attended by ACTF&R allowing them to respond more readily to genuine emergencies.

From 1 July 2019 the false alarm charge will increase:

Disallowable instrument, DI2019-90.

<https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/di/2019-90/>

- Item 289 Residential false alarm fee \$280.00
- Item 291 Chargeable false alarm fee \$1397.00

In certain circumstances, such as for storms and other natural disasters, false alarms may not be charged if the alarm was beyond the control of the owner.

There are additional circumstances (leniencies) resulting in no charge, including:

- One false alarm within a 60 day period will not be charged. Subsequent false alarms which occur within 60 days of the first alarm will be charged.
- A fee is not payable for a false alarm where, in the sole opinion of the Chief Officer, the alarm:
 - I. could not have been prevented by reasonable maintenance of the alarm system: or
 - II. was activated by a circumstance beyond the reasonable control of the "owner" as defined in the Emergencies Act 2004.

<http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2004-28> /current/pdf/2004-28.pdf

Billing of charges

Building owners or managers are responsible and accountable for the payment of false alarm charges resulting from unwanted false alarms. ACTF&R invoices AFASPs, they in turn invoice building owners or managers.

ACTF&R has no involvement where owners forward false alarm costs on to a third party, such as hotel guests when the activation resulted from normal occupant activities such as cooking and showering.

Main causes of false alarms

Most common causes are listed first:

- Poor building maintenance
- AFA System malfunctions
- Burnt toast
- Cooking fumes
- Steam

Avoiding false alarms

- Aerosols sprays
- Cigarettes/candles
- Workmen/cleaners
- Dirty smoke detectors
- 'Break Glass' alarm damage

For building owners, tenants, managers and workers:

Effective maintenance of AFA systems is critical in reducing false alarms. The primary cause of false alarms is poorly maintained systems. Well-regulated work place protocols can also be effective in reducing false alarms. There are a number of ways workers can set off false alarms:

- Ensure any fans, vents, and if possible windows, are open before cooking or showering.
- Smoke detectors are extremely sensitive. Steam from showers, smoke from burning food, aerosol sprays such as deodorant and hair-spray can activate them.
- Be aware of detector locations and ensure all reasonable measures are taken to avoid false alarm activation.
- Dust
- Cutting wires
- Spraying
- Steamcleaning

All workers on-site must register with the building owner or manager and be inducted into the workplace processes ensuring appropriate isolation of AFA systems and responsible work-site activities. In some circumstances a change of detector type, sensitivity or location may also reduce unwanted alarm activations. There are a number of specialist companies who can provide advice on options. ACTF&R may also be contacted for advice.

'Request for non-payment of false alarm fee'

An AFASP, building owner or manager may lodge an application with ACTF&R seeking the Chief Officer's consideration and decision under provisions of the instrument. The application must be made not more than 180 calendar days from the invoice date.

<http://esa.act.gov.au/community-information/publications/fire-safety-policies/>

ACTF&R officers attending incidents do not have authority to waive or review AFA false alarm charges. The review of AFA false alarm charges is at the discretion of the Chief Officer ACTF&R.

Contact

For billing enquiries regarding AFA charges please contact your AFASP.

Applications and requests for further information may be emailed to ACTFR.AFAManager@act.gov.au or posted to **ACT Fire & Rescue**, AFA Manager, GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601

.....Authorised delegate of ACT Fire & Rescue

