

Fire service to stop attending fire alarms

Businesses **with automatic fire alarm systems** are being urged to check their fire safety risk assessments and fire alarm systems are in order and working correctly ahead of new proposals that could affect them.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) has been called out to 30,000 automatic alarms in the last five years, of which 99.07% were false alarms. These were often caused by dust or faulty equipment and the responsibility to maintain equipment lies with the responsible person. KFRS intends to stop attending calls to automatic alarms, unless they get a 999 call in the normal way to say there is actually a fire.

The impact of false fire alarms is far-reaching, causing significant disruption to the business itself, along with any other commercial and residential users of the building where the alarm is sounding. Poorly designed or maintained systems can result in the need to evacuate the entire premises because someone has burned the toast or a sensor has been triggered by dust or insects. This is not only costly for manufacturers and traders in terms of time lost, but can also be very inconvenient for those working or living in the affected building.

From a safety perspective, fire safety experts are concerned that frequent false fire alarms leads to complacency amongst occupants; so that when a fire alarm sounds, people do not start to evacuate buildings as they should, putting themselves at risk in the event of an actual fire.

In addition, attending unwanted fire alarm calls means that fire engines are not available to attend genuine emergencies, such as house fires and road traffic collisions. The proposed changes will ensure KFRS uses its resources most effectively to save lives and reduce risk.

There is no legal requirement for fire and rescue services to attend calls to fire alarms sounding, however KFRS will be considering at-risk sites and ensuring that it continues to protect vulnerable communities. The requirement for maintaining and managing a fire alarm system sits with the responsible person for the building or site. This includes a responsibility to make sure the system operates correctly and does not produce unwanted calls.

KFRS's Head of Technical Fire Safety John Robertson said: "Between now and the start of the proposed new policy in April 2012, our officers will be providing advice and support for those responsible for managing fire safety measures and fire alarm systems.

“We will be helping businesses and other premises to get ready for the changes to ensure their fire alarm systems and procedures are robust, as well as working with them to help reduce the number of unwanted calls these systems produce.”

KFRS shall be meeting with a wide range of stakeholders to raise awareness of the proposed changes and to discuss any concerns people may have. A period of public consultation is also planned later in the year.

For more information visit www.kent.fire-uk.org.