

	<b>HARRISONBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT</b> General Orders	<b>Policy Number:</b> 414
	<b>Chapter:</b> Field Operations	<b>Total Pages:</b> 4
	<b>Section:</b> Response to Alarms	<b>Issue Date:</b> 07/02/2021
	<b>Issued By:</b> Kelley Warner, Chief of Police	<b>Effective Date:</b> 07/02/2021
	<b>Replaces:</b> All General Orders Previously Issued Relative to Subject	
<b>VALEAC Standards: OPR.01.01 (c)</b>		

## A. POLICY AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this directive is to outline a plan to be followed for responding to and handling security alarms. Officers shall be aware that alarms can be activated in a number of ways and the nature of the alarm may determine the type of response. Officers shall follow the procedures set forth in this policy to enhance arrest possibilities of suspects, observe proper precautions for the safety of officers, employees and bystanders, and to identify and implement problem-solving strategies to reduce false alarms.

## B. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this policy. Responsibility rests with the supervisor to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated. This directive is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

## C. DEFINITIONS

**False Alarm** - any alarm signal communicated to the Emergency Communications Center which is not in response to an actual or threatened hazard.

- a. False alarms shall include negligently or accidentally activated signals; signals which are activated as the result of faulty, and malfunctioning or improperly installed or maintained equipment.
- b. False alarms shall not include signals which are activated by unusually severe weather conditions or other causes which are identified and determined, after evaluation by Emergency Communications Center, Harrisonburg Fire Chief or the Chief of Police, as applicable, to be beyond the control of the owner or the user of an alarm system.

**Deliberate False Alarms** - Any person who intentionally or deliberately and without just cause activates an alarm system in a non-emergency situation and by such action causes an emergency response to be made by the Police Department, Fire and Emergency Services Departments, either or both, shall be deemed guilty of a Class I Misdemeanor. ([VA Code §18.2-212](#) and [VA Code §18.2-461](#))

**Financial Institution** - A business that provides financial services for its clients or members to accept and manage deposits and make loans. These types of businesses operate primarily, but not exclusively, as banks or credit unions. Check cashing establishments, insurance companies, mortgage loans and investment fund businesses are not considered financial institutions.

#### **D. INITIAL POLICE RESPONSE TO ALARMS**

- a. Officers shall proceed with extreme caution when answering any type of alarm call.
- b. When an alarm signal is received, two units shall be dispatched and shall respond immediately to the alarm location. Responding units shall be alert for suspicious activity.
- c. When using emergency equipment, officers shall follow all applicable Department procedures and respond sensibly and cautiously. Audible alarms, however, do not justify an emergency response. Officers shall respond to audible alarms according to posted speed limits and traffic control devices.
- d. The first police unit to arrive at the alarm scene shall approach the premises cautiously, being observant for possible getaway cars, lookouts, or other suspicious signs. After this initial assessment, the first unit on the scene shall immediately advise other units. The first unit shall assume a position to cover the entrance without being seen from inside the facility unless it has been determined that the suspects have already fled the scene. Any suspects leaving the building should not be able to see the police vehicles.
- e. The second police unit to arrive at the scene shall assume a position that covers the second most likely exit without being seen from inside the facility unless it has been determined that suspects have already fled the scene.
- f. If detectives or plainclothes officers respond to the alarm, they shall have a visible type of identification that signifies them as police officers and communicate such as the situation permits by radio.

#### **E. PROCEDURES UPON DETERMINATION THAT A ROBBERY OR BURGLARY HAS OCCURRED**

- a. Upon arrival, if the officers confirm that a robbery or burglary has occurred, they shall secure the scene, protect all evidence, identify witnesses, and ensure that injured people receive medical attention.
- b. In the case of a verified alarm, the on-duty supervisor shall direct other patrol units to monitor possible escape routes, assume a perimeter around the premises (if possible) or resume other duties.
- c. Once it has been determined that a robbery or burglary has occurred, the first officer responding will obtain enough information for a preliminary all-unit broadcast to be sent out. This broadcast shall include a brief physical description of the suspect(s), direction of travel and weapons used. A more detailed broadcast shall be given after witnesses have been located and more thoroughly interviewed.
- d. Responding officers will collect appropriate information for the Incident Based Report (IBR) with the appropriate incident classification.

## **F. PROCEDURES IN CASES OF ALARMS AT FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

- a. It is important that the details of this procedure be handled as confidential information and be released to no one except authorized law enforcement officials. It is the Department's primary responsibility to ensure the safety of the officers responding to the alarm, employees and other citizens. Through the proper use of this procedure, it is felt that the possibilities for an apprehension will be greatly increased:
  1. A representative of the financial institution, with an official staff identification card prominently displayed on his/her lapel, will position him/herself in front of the financial institution where he/she may be clearly seen and easily identified by the responding police units.
  2. The financial institution representative will advise the first officer arriving on the scene as to the status of the alarm. If a robbery has occurred, the representative will give the officer a brief description of the suspect(s), direction of travel and weapons used. He/she will request medical help as needed.
- b. If no financial institution employee approaches in a reasonable time, officers shall consider the alarm to be a robbery in progress. In this event, the on-duty supervisor may consider the possibility of hostage taking within the business and may request a tactical unit.
- c. If the on-scene police supervisor determines that the alarm is false, he/she shall not rely solely on the financial institution official's statement but must enter the financial institution with its representative to verify the situation and notify Emergency Communications Center.
- d. In verifying that an alarm is false, the interior of the financial institution shall be inspected for any unusual activity. After verifying that the alarm is false, the first officer on the scene shall cancel all other units responding.
- e. In situations where an alarm is false, the first responding officer shall notify the Emergency Communications Center to amend the call, declaring the alarm "false" and whether a financial institution representative met the officers outside of the premises.

## **G. POLICE RESPONSE TO BUSINESS AND RESIDENTIAL ALARMS**

- a. If the residence is secure upon inspection by the officer, no key-holder response is required.
- b. If officers discover physical signs of a break-in, they shall assume that a suspect or suspects may be inside the business or residence. The officers shall also consider the possibility that hostages may have been taken. If appropriate, the officers shall summon the canine unit. In any event, the officers shall conduct a thorough search of the premises.
- c. If no one is home and the officer determines that the premise is secure and no break-in or attempt has occurred (i.e. a false alarm), and the key holder cannot respond in a timely manner, the officer will complete an 115- Alarm Door Hanger and attach it to the entry doorknob or other conspicuous location on the premises.

## **H. FALSE ALARMS**

When the responding officer determines that an alarm is deemed to be a false activation, as outlined in [5-7-2](#) of the City of Harrisonburg Code Ordinance the officer shall notify Emergency Communications Center of the false categorization so it can be documented in the CAD system.

- a. If a keyholder is on-scene, officers will verify with them that it was a false activation.
- b. If a keyholder is not present, the responding officer will attach a form 115- Alarm Door Hanger to the entry doorknob or in another conspicuous location on the premises.

## **I. FALSE ALARM REDUCTION**

The City contracts with a private corporation to implement and administer the alarm program. The contractor is responsible for alarm registration and false alarm billing.

- a. Appeals will be received and reviewed in accordance with City Code [5-7-10](#). Unless otherwise directed, the False Alarm Reduction Unit will review alarm appeals and may grant relief or affirm the fee or decision.
- b. Classification of alarms, fees to excessive false alarms, and responsibilities of alarm users and companies can be found in Chapter 7 (Title 5, Public Safety) of the City of Harrisonburg Code Ordinance.