Built Environment Section Fact Sheet

Managing Unwanted False Alarms – Privately Monitored Commercial

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

Government of South Australia
METROPOLITAN FIRE SERVICE SOUTH AUSTRALIA
JAN 2022

CONTENTS

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

Government of South Australia
METROPOLITAN FIRE SERVICE SOUTH AUSTRALIA
JAN 2022

MANAGING SYSTEM FAULTS AND FIRE ALARM MAINTENANCE

Fire Alarm Systems

In all buildings with a privately monitored fire alarm system there is a need for a structured fire alarm system maintenance schedule to ensure optimum functionality. Only properly accredited maintenance contractors should be employed to maintain your fire alarm system. Fire alarm systems need to be cleaned, maintained and tested on a regular basis.

Fire Alarm Maintenance and System Fault Recommendations

- Be clear with service contractor about the standard of service to be delivered.
- Make an agreement with security services provider as to when the technician is to be called following fire alarm activation.
- The MFS recommends using only qualified fire alarms technicians to do work on the fire alarm system
- Ask technician to show you exactly what maintenance needs to be done.
- Keep a logbook of all maintenance and changes to alarm systems.
- Take an interest in ensuring fastidious attention to detail occurs with the introduction of a planned maintenance schedule.
- Ensure maintenance is kept up to a contracted standard.
- Buildings located close to the ocean may require additional maintenance of their fire alarm system.
- Provide advice to tenants at time of registration, about optimum management of fire alarm systems.
- Before becoming owner/occupier/manager of a building fitted with a privately monitored fire alarm system establish that the fire alarm system is up to standard.
- Conduct regular staff training in how to use the privately monitored fire alarm system.
- Ensure staff and contractors that maintain fire alarm systems have the appropriate accreditation.
- Fire alarm zone isolation procedures should be discussed and signed with workers.
- Regular tests must be carried out on all detectors
- Electrical conduits and detector bases should be sealed against insect infestation.
- That regular housekeeping is affected to avoid dust build-up and to ensure doors are not wedged open to allow dust and insects to enter.
- Ensure smoke doors are functioning correctly.
- Ensure self-closing doors do actually close.

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

BUILDING DESIGN PROBLEMS

Building design is frequently found to be the cause for unwanted alarm activations due to:

- Incorrect fire alarm systems being installed for the design of the building
- Detectors located too close to problematic environmental factors such as showers
- Inadequate ventilation for cooking facilities, industrial work areas etc.

Fire alarm systems should be designed and installed to suit the purpose of the building.

Building Design Solutions

- Ensure that the installed fire alarm system is compatible with the building and the environment.
- Check with fire system contractor that detectors are in correct positions.
- Is it possible to replace smoke detectors with a more suitable type?
- Consult with security services provider over any plans for change to the alarm system or detector positioning.
- Review the capacity to remove or relocate potential alarm initiators such as toasters and cooking devices.
- Check to see if the floor plan layout has changed since the fire alarm system was originally installed.
- When current fire alarm systems reach the end of their life, ensure the fire alarm system and alarm panel are upgraded to optimum standards.
- Upgrade buildings that prevent water penetration due to poor internal and external plumbing design.
- Upgrade building design and layout where inadequate ventilation management exists e.g. no door head from bathrooms, or ventilation draws cooking fumes from kitchen areas past smoke detectors.

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

Government of South Australia
METROPOLITAN FIRE SERVICE SOUTH AUSTRALIA
JAN 2022

MANAGING BUILDING MAINTENANCE WORKS - DEALING WITH WORKERS/CONTRACTORS

Workers and contractors can unintentionally set off privately monitored fire alarm systems by conducting work such as welding and using heating appliances; mowing and landscaping; and cleaning (steam and air blowers) and pest fumigation etc. Check that all tradespersons who enter the building are conversant with (and have preferably signed) the building trade work policy.

- Hot work permits;
- Covering detectors that could be affected by heat / smoke / dust;
- Isolating zones that could be affected by heat / smoke / dust;
- Liability; and
- Permission to access/work in the building.

Strategies

- Brief workers, contractors, and maintenance staff on how to work in the building with alarms and how the alarms themselves work.
- Introduce work permits that detail strict alarm isolation procedure to be adopted before any work is carried out on the premises.
- Explain why and how the fire alarm detectors have to be isolated before starting work.
- It may become necessary to cover detectors temporarily.
- Nominate a person as a safety watch while the fire alarm zone is isolated.
- Explain the monitoring company's procedure when an alarm is activated.
- Explain the consequences of what will happen if an unwanted alarm activation occurs and what your business policy is for payment of a chargeable alarm.
- Establish who is responsible for reinstating the alarm system upon the completion of work.
- Make sure particular care is taken over the use of grinders and gas equipment as gases may drift to other non-isolated zones in the area - this could involve installing automatic closing doors for use in confined areas.
- Ensure workers or contractors do not cut any fire alarm cabling.
- Ensure system is returned to normal after any building works or modifications.

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

Government of South Australia
METROPOLITAN FIRE SERVICE SOUTH AUSTRALIA
JAN 2022

MODIFYING THE FIRE ALARM SYSTEM

There are many possible solutions for minimising false alarms. Modifying the system is the least favoured option however it may be the only solution in some cases. The MFS False Alarms Officer or your security services provider may be able to provide advice about modifications. Some modifications may also require the lodgement of a building application with a building certifier or local council. The MFS recommends using only qualified alarms technicians to do work on your alarm system. Possibilities include:

- Relocating detectors;
- Changing types of detectors;
- Upgrading to intelligent type of detector if the fire alarm panel can support this;
- Removal of detectors where they are outside of the Building Code requirements;
- Activate/install Alarm Verification Facility (AVF) if the fire alarm panel can support this (check with MFS Community Safety Department).

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF OWNER/OCCUPIER

Pass on all information relevant about the fire alarm system to any caretaker manager or new owner/occupiers.

- Know how to read the fire alarm display.
- Know the relationship between the fire alarm zones, the mimic board/drawing and the building layout.
- Check that the mimic board is accurate and correctly orientated.
- Know how the fire alarm system functions.
- Know how to use the Public Address (PA), Early Warning System (EWS), Early Warning and Intercommunication System (EWIS) if fitted.
- Know the procedure to carry out when an alarm activates.

Check that all residents/occupiers know the following:

- Fire evacuation procedures
- Assembly area's
- What to do when the fire alarm activates
- Their responsibilities when workers/contractors come to do work in their room/area
- How to live with the fire alarm system.

What should you do when the fire alarm activates? The most important thing to remember is that -

"LIFE ALWAYS TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER MATERIAL LOSS!"

- The MFS is on the way; keep everyone calm.
- Evacuate as per the Home Fire Escape Plan.
- Call 000 to ensure fire has been reported.
- Be visible, meet the MFS on arrival and let them know what you've done so far.

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

Government of South Australia
METROPOLITAN FIRE SERVICE SOUTH AUSTRALIA
JAN 2022

CHECKLIST

- Always liaise with your fire alarm monitoring / maintenance contractor.
- Ensure regular maintenance and testing of your fire alarm system.
- If planning any building alteration or major works, seek advice from your fire alarm monitoring company before commencing work.

During building or maintenance work: -

- Does the work produce dust or fumes in or near an alarm-protected area?
- Will activities involve penetrating or demolishing a wall or ceiling?
- Will welding, gas cutting, use of heat guns, sanding or grinding be carried out?
- Cover smoke detectors during periods of maintenance if work processes are likely to create unwanted alarm activations e.g. painting or dusting. Remove dust covers when work complete.
- Where smoke detectors are fitted, do not run equipment inside that emits dust or fumes, e.g. grinding machinery or exhaust fumes.
- Ensure smoke detectors are not fitted where smoke or steam are present inside buildings e.g. near toasters, kitchens or showers.
- Ensure maintenance workers or other contractors do not cut fire alarm cabling.
- Inform guests of ways to prevent unwanted alarm activations.
- Ensure system is returned to normal after any building works or modifications.

Adelaide Station
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Enquiries 8204 3611
samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

Government of South Australia

METROPOLITAN FIRE SERVICE SOUTH AUSTRALIA

JAN 2022