



Guidance note

Connection Agreement Between: Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations (FAMO) and Fire Rescue Services (FRS)

Introduction

The numbers of false alarms that occur within premises is unknown but Fire Rescue Services attended 225,454 fire false alarms in the year ending June 2017¹. These are referred to as Unwanted Fire Signals. Many false alarms do not result in a call to the FRS because they are filtered out through on-site practices or at remote monitoring centres. However, there is scope to improve those arrangements to further reduce the unnecessary waste of, and the burden on, valuable FRS resources.

Alarm monitoring services provide the valuable function of protecting unoccupied property and as a back up to on-site filtering arrangements, particularly outside normal working hours. In addition, vulnerable groups are afforded protection through monitored fire alarms, which are part of social alarm system provision.

The implementation of fire detection and fire alarm systems, with more detector heads, are only likely to increase in the future – and the opportunity for false alarms will therefore also increase. There is, at this time, no consistent approach to the arrangements between FRSs and FAMOs. This Connection Agreement has been introduced to aid both an improvement in operating standards and consistency across the FAMO industry. It is not legally binding or enforceable in itself. However, it could have no adverse impact on any existing individual local agreements or arrangements that may be in place. There are no discernible disadvantages in adopting this agreement that, in respect of FAMO call handling, only encourages consistency across all FRS and encourages basic best practice.

The Agreement is not designed to require anything over and above existing (and updated) fire alarm monitoring industry standards, including the 'NFCC Code of Practice: Best Practice for Summoning a Fire Response via Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations'. It requires FAMOs to become third party accredited in order to independently evidence that they are delivering on the standards their own industry requires in order to deliver an effective service. When considering that these standards are concerned with passing potential lifesaving communication to emergency services, this should not be in question.

Intention

Through formalising a standard connection approach, this aims to improve the consistency and understanding, as well as improve the co-operation, between those involved in practices that are concerned with the summoning of FRS.

¹ Gov UK: [National Statistics](#) - Fire and rescue incident statistics: England, July 2016 to June 2017

The Agreement is designed to encourage the adoption of practices intended to improve the reliability and quality of communicated information. Having a formal understanding in place that references the industry standards that are to be followed draws attention to relevant responsibilities and provides a reference point that does not currently exist.

NFCC would recommend that where a FAMO fails to deliver on the standards required under the agreement, that every means of encouraging improvements is applied rather than taking the position of not responding to future unconfirmed fire calls. If a FAMO is unable to operate to the standards after all reasonable opportunities have been explored, the FAMO should seek to pass monitoring services to a suitable alternative service.

The NFCC have introduced this agreement to encourage improvement in the reliability of monitored fire alarm calls. Ultimately it should improve the related performance standards in the industry.

Summary of use of the Connection Agreement

Fire Rescue Services are recommended to:

- Ask all existing and new FAMOs to sign up to it.
- Recognise FAMOs providing telecare type services are not expected to be third party accredited until at least January 2019.
- Continue to accept calls from FAMOs that haven't signed the agreement, not accredited, or have yet to meet the required industry standards – but encourage and work with them to achieve the correct standards as soon as possible. For those that will not meet the required industry standards, despite all reasonable support, they should pass monitoring services to a suitably capable provider. This should be backed by data demonstrating the reliability of their fire calls and quality of monitoring being delivered.
- Establish a means to identify FAMOs operating in their region and register which are signed up to the connection agreement.
- Establish a data set that indicates the outcome of fire alarm calls received from FAMOs. Share this information with the FAMO so that they can see the outcome of calls passed to FRS.
- Request data from FAMOs over calls they filter. Calculate the 'performance' of the FAMO from a ratio of calls passed to FRS that are genuine. Use this data set to assist in improving future performance and establishing a suitable benchmark.
- Monitor received calls to identify unknown FAMOs operating in the region and to support data capture.
- NFCC contact: NFCC AFA/UwFS Working group via nfccadminsupport@nationalfirechiefs.org.uk