



# False Alarms<sup>1</sup>

A false alarm happens when a home or business alarm system is activated, law enforcement is notified and responds, but there is no evidence of criminal activity. This is a significant problem because only about 10% of alarm users create nearly 90% of the alarm activations, and more than 75% of false alarms are from *preventable* user errors. Not only is this a poor use of tax dollars, but it also poses a serious risk that law enforcement will not be able to answer legitimate calls for help. Some local governments levy fines for false alarms.

Some false alarms are hard to prevent (such as those triggered by severe weather) but most can be avoided. Here are some steps to take to prevent false alarms:

1. Understand how your alarm system works. This includes closing and locking all doors and windows; preventing pets, plants, balloons, curtains, decorations, and any other item from triggering motion sensors; knowing how to cancel the activated alarm system; and educating *all* users (family, friends, and service persons) about the system, codes, necessary telephone numbers, and pass words.
2. Perform regular maintenance on your alarm system. This is the same as any other working component of your house. Many security companies offer maintenance plans with annual check-ups.

3. Communicate with your security company. This is especially important if you do not think your alarm system is operating properly, if you are performing any repair or remodeling, if you make any changes to your contact information, or if you have installed any new equipment. Your alarm system is subject to damage, wear, and tear just as much as electrical wiring, telephone lines, or plumbing.

## Cautions:

- You must be able to trust the company and any personnel working on or installing your alarm system—please check all sources for verification.
- Avoid using a company whose central monitoring station requests a police dispatch for power outages, low battery signals, or loss of telephone service—this is the job of the security company.
- Study your contract and warranty provisions—you need to know all the terms, conditions, and limitations to ensure protection.
- Address any problems immediately—first through your security company. If you have a problem with the company, contact licensure officials.

<sup>1</sup>*DISCLAIMER – This piece is intended to give the reader only general factual information current at the time of publication. This piece is **not** a substitute for professional advice and should not be used for guidance or decisions related to a specific design or construction project. This piece is not intended to reflect the opinion of any of the entities, agencies or organizations identified in the materials and, if any opinions appear, are those of the individual author and should not be relied upon in any event. [Applicable to 2004 Florida Building Code.]*

- Address any problems in writing (for documentation)—express your concerns clearly, concisely, and unemotionally for best results.
- Anyone who works on or sells an alarm system must be licensed and have a state-mandated identification card (valid for two years). Failure to ensure proper licensing could put *you* at risk in many ways.
- Contact local law enforcement to determine whether your system needs to be registered and if there are any fines or penalties for repeated false alarms.
- Contact your local building department to determine whether a permit is needed for installation of a security system.

#### **Government Agencies/Offices:**

Florida Building Commission: 850-487-1824 / [www.floridabuilding.org](http://www.floridabuilding.org)

Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Electrical Contractors Licensing Board: 850-487-1395 / [www.myflorida.com/dbpr](http://www.myflorida.com/dbpr)

Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Office of Unlicensed Activity: 850-487-1395 / [www.myflorida.com/dbpr](http://www.myflorida.com/dbpr)

Florida Attorney General: 850-414-3300 / <http://myfloridalegal.com>

Florida Department of Financial Services, Division of Workers' Compensation: 850-413-1601 / [www.fldfs.com/WC](http://www.fldfs.com/WC)

Florida Department of Financial Services, Division of Consumer Services: 800-342-2762 / [www.fldfs.com/consumers](http://www.fldfs.com/consumers)

Florida Department of State, Division of Corporations: 800-755-5111 / [www.sunbiz.org](http://www.sunbiz.org)

Your county or municipal building department (please see the government section of your telephone book—look under “building,” “plans,” “inspections,” or “zoning.”)

Local police or sheriff office (see the government section of your telephone book—look under “law enforcement” and check to see if there is a non-emergency number)

#### **Other Resources:**

False Alarm Reduction Association, *Consumer Guide to Purchasing a Burglar Alarm*: [www.faraonline.org](http://www.faraonline.org)

Alarm Association of Florida, Inc.: [www.flalarms.org](http://www.flalarms.org)

NBFAA Marketing Department: 301-585-1855 / [www.alarm.org](http://www.alarm.org)

#### **Don't know where to go for an answer to a specific question?**

Contact: Building A Safer Florida, Inc. 1-850-222-2772 or [www.buildingasaferflorida.org](http://www.buildingasaferflorida.org)

This document was developed jointly by Building a Safer Florida and the University of Florida's Program for Resource Efficient Communities ([www.energy.ufl.edu](http://www.energy.ufl.edu)) with input and assistance from:

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- Alarm Association of Florida, Inc.
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