Christiansburg Police Department
Alarm Reduction Proposal

Why is the Police Department suggesting a charge for false burglar alarms?

Over a two year study period, the police department responded to 594 false burglar alarms consuming 432 hours of manpower, (Police Officers and Communications Personnel), equating a cost of approximately $9,000.

After studying data between commercial alarms and residential alarms, the police department found that the problem exists primarily with commercial properties that have repeat false alarms calls, in some cases as many as four in one day. During the period of our study there were 571 commercial alarms resulting in only two valid calls. By contrast we had only 23 residential calls with no criminal activity.

The police department has studied three other communities within the Commonwealth, two who have an existing false alarm reduction code and one who recently passed an ordinance. The Police Department is proposing a program to charge property owners for repeat false alarms responses in the hope that this measure will correct the situation, thereby reducing the strain on police resources.

What happens if a property owner does not register their alarm or does not pay fines but an alarm is activated?

The Police Department will always respond to citizen's request for service. However, if an alarm owner fails to pay the fines and an alarm company request police responses, the police will not send a unit to the property until or unless the citizen, responsible party, or owner is on scene.

Will the Police Department work with the property owners and businesses to explain the new system?

Yes. As part of the proposed fee system, each business/resident would be asked to voluntarily register their alarm system with the police department. This is an annual registration that will cost $25 and will include a packet of information with confirmation of registration, the fee schedule, and places to direct questions and concerns, and opportunities for additional education.

Each year when the businesses renew their business license they will get a registration form to update and businesses will also be required to do this whenever these is a change in their responsible parties.

Will these fees increase revenues for the future?

The intent of the program or ordinance is to reduce the number of false alarms, not to increase revenue. However, because of the registration fee and possible charges for excessive alarms the town will see revenue generated.

$25 Annual registration fee *
$250 Flat rate fee for the year on commercial properties **

* This allows for two false alarms, after the third a rate of $50 per call will be assessed.
** This allows for eight false alarms, with a rate of $50 per call after those.

Why would there be fines for commercial properties and not residential responses?

The fines are based on cost recovery for police services. In the case of commercial properties, typically more than one officer, and as many as three will respond and can wait up to an hour for a responsible party to arrive to check the business. For residential calls, two officers are typically dispatched. As a result, the cost to the police department to respond to commercial calls is higher than residential calls.

Do other jurisdictions charge for false alarms?

Yes

Roanoke	$25 to register $100 for each alarm after 5 Non-registered $125 up to $150 after 6
Virginia Beach	What is proposed
Fairfax	What is proposed
Norfolk	$25 for first, $45 for each after

Are businesses granted their two or eight "free" false alarms every calendar year or are they cumulative?

The number of false alarm calls will only be counted in a 12 month period for the time the property owner has their alarm registered. Each property owner will get two or eight free false alarm calls every 12 months before they are charged. At the time they renew their business license they will be asked to update their pertinent information.

Christiansburg Police Department
False Alarm Reduction Ordinance

Section 1 – Alarm system user registration and permits

A. Every alarm user shall, between the dates of August 01 and August 31 of each year, obtain an alarm system user permit from the Town for the operation of such alarm system. If the alarm system is to be installed or maintained by an alarm company operator, the alarm company operator may obtain the required permit for the alarm system user. The person applying for the permit required in this section shall state on a permit application form provided by the Town the following: name, address of the commercial premises, telephone number of the alarm system user, the type of alarm system (local or monitored), name of the alarm company operator selling or leasing the new or existing alarm system equipment or services and the names, addresses and telephone numbers of at least two (2) other persons who can be reached at any time, day or night, and who are authorized to respond to an alarm signal and who can open and represent the premises in which the system is installed for reporting and investigative purposes. It shall be the responsibility of the alarm system user to make sure that such persons respond within twenty (20) minutes of notification by the Town. It shall be the responsibility of the alarm system user to notify the Town in writing of any subsequent changes in the information provided on the permit application. Upon approval by the Town Manager of the permit application, the permit shall be issued to the alarm system user.
B. Annual registration applications shall be accompanied by a non-refundable fee of twenty-five dollars ($25) to cover the cost of processing the application.
C. Any alarm system user who operates or allows an alarm system to be operated without first obtaining a permit as required by this section, or who, after having a permit revoked, operates or allows the system to be operated, shall be in violation of this article, and subject to fine, as provided by section eight (8). The alarm system user to whom the alarm system user permit should have been or was issued, in the case of revocation, shall be the person held in violation.
D. This permit requirement is intended to assist the police and fire department and the Town Manager in the administrative of the provisions of this article and shall not be deemed to create any special duty with respect to the protected premises beyond that owed to the general public.
E. Permits issued under this article shall be nontransferable.

Section 2 – Duties of alarm system users

A. Alarm system users shall instruct employees, tenants or others who may have occasion to activate an alarm that alarm systems are to be activated only in emergency situations to summon an immediate police or fire department response and shall instruct as to the operation of the alarm system, including setting, activation, deactivation and resetting of the alarm. All instructions pertaining to alarm systems and procedures shall be in written form, suitable for distribution and shall be available for inspection by representatives of the police or fire department. The alarm system user shall be responsible for maintaining the alarm system in proper working order.
B. An alarm system user or person authorized and capable of deactivating the alarm, who allows an alarm to continue to emit and audible signal for twenty (20) minutes after notification of the alarm commencing to emit such signal shall be guilty of a class 3 misdemeanor.

Section 3 – Alarm company operator registration

A. Every alarm company operator shall, within thirty (30) days after the effective date of this article, register with the town on forms provided by the town. The application for registration shall include name of the alarm company operator, names of owners and officers and the services offered by the alarm company operator. It shall be the responsibility of the alarm company operator to notify the Town in writing of any subsequent changes in the information provided on the application for registration.
B. Registration applications shall be accompanied by a non-refundable fee of twenty-five dollars ($25) to cover the costs of processing the application. The registration must be renewed annual thereafter at an annual fee of twenty-five dollars ($25).

Section 4 – Duties of alarm company operators

A. No commercial alarm system shall be installed, monitored, altered, serviced or repaired to a level of operation by an alarm company operator unless the alarm system user has complied with the registration and permit provisions of section 1.
B. Every alarm company operator that installs, monitors, alters, services or repairs an alarm system after the effective date of this article shall certify on the permit required in section 1 that the alarm system user has been instructed in the proper use and operation of the alarm system.

Section 5 – Service charges for false alarms

A. In addition to the $25.00 registration fee, the owner of an alarm system may choose a flat rate of two hundred fifty ($250) for a commercial property for eight (8) false alarm responses and fifty dollars ($50) for each call after that shall be assessed. Otherwise a fee of fifty dollars ($50) will be charged after the first two false alarms. A fee of one hundred dollars ($100) shall be charged for each false fire or security alarm occurrence for an unregistered alarm user. In addition to the service charge, an unregistered alarm system will be charged a registration fee.
B. No service charge shall apply to the first two (2) false fire and/or security alarms in each calendar year for each registered location provided the alarm system user is a registered permit holder. A service charge of fifty dollars ($50) for each false fire or security alarm occurrence over two (2) alarms shall be assessed against the alarm system user who activates, utilizes, operates or maintains an alarm system within the town.
C. Any service charge or fee billed under this article shall be due thirty (30) days from the date of invoice by the Town and shall be payable to the Town Treasurer.

Section 6 – Failure to pay service charges; revocation of permit

All service charges assessed against the permit holder, or alarm system user of the protected premises if registered or not, who activates, utilizes, operates or maintains an alarm system shall be paid to the Town Treasurer. In the event legal action is necessary to collect the service charges, the owner or tenant shall be required to pay for any and all attorney fees and other costs expended by the Town to collect such funds. The failure of a permit holder to pay any service charge assessed under this article when due shall constitute grounds for the revocation of an alarm permit by the Town Manager. The continued operation of an alarm system by the persons who activates, utilizes and/or maintains an alarm system after notification that the permit has been revoked shall constitute a class 3 misdemeanor. An alarm permit that has been revoked pursuant to this section may be reinstated by the Town Manager upon payment of all outstanding service charges, a reinstatement fee or fifty dollars ($50), and compliance with all other requirements of this article.

Section 7 – Appeals

Upon an appeal made in writing to the Town Manager within thirty (30) days of the date of receiving the Town's invoice any person against whom a service charge has been assessed under this article may appeal such charge to be reviewed by the Town Manager. The appeal shall include a brief statement setting forth why the person against whom the charge has been assessed believes that the service charge is not valid. The Town Manager may waive all or a portion of the service charge for good cause shown in the appeal.

Section 8 – Penalties

Except as otherwise provided, any person who violates any section of this article shall be guilty of a class 3 misdemeanor.