



## VERIFIED RESPONSE Q&A

**Q: Will a community save hundreds of thousands of dollars by not responding to invalid alarm responses?**

A. No! The actual expenses will not decrease unless there is a plan to lay off officers to reduce payroll! In fact the city will lose the revenue generated from the alarm fines because they no longer respond. Larger cities generate multi-millions of dollars in permits and fines every year.

**Q: Don't police miss critical emergency calls because of response to alarms?**

A. No! Law enforcement policies outline priorities for dispatch; officers are routinely taken off lower priority calls for higher priority emergency calls – besides safety, this is one of the main reasons they carry portable communication devices.

**Q: How many responses are generated by each alarm system?**

A: In municipalities that strictly enforce their ordinances, the average response to residential alarms has been reduced to between .27 percent and .35 percent. This translates to one dispatch every 3 to 4 years for the average residential customers.

Commercial alarms have been reduced from an average of 3.5 to 1.8 alarms per annum.

**Q: If these averages are accurate who is causing the dispatches?**

A: Using information provided by participating law enforcement agencies, it has been determined that the largest abusers by category are schools, churches, municipal buildings and large retail or industrial applications. This makes sense since all of these systems allow multiple users to have access to the systems.

The latest numbers reflect that less than 10% of the systems represent almost 90% of the responses.

**Q: Ordinances have been unsuccessful at curbing the invalid alarm problem, haven't they?**

A: Successful ordinances provide a proven solution to reducing invalid alarms if they are enforced by the municipality. Where the Model Ordinance, developed jointly with law enforcement, has been implemented and enforced, invalid alarms have gone down. Charlotte, NC., Phoenix, AZ, Montgomery County, MD, Gainesville, FL, and many others have had long-term success. Charlotte has more than doubled in the number of permitted alarm systems over the last nine years, yet has steadily DECREASED dispatches 76%.

**Q: Don't industry efforts heavily burden the police with the responsibility for reduction and enforcement on invalid alarms?**

A: The alarm industry always promotes joint reduction efforts with law enforcement. This demonstrates the most success on a long-term basis. However, to counter this, the alarm industry has developed measures that can be deployed by police policy, require minimal administration on the part of law enforcement, yet produce significant results. Boulder, Colorado has implemented such a policy and reductions to date have reached over 60%.

Effective enforcement requires a coordinated effort from law enforcement, alarm administrators and the alarm companies who serve the community. All parties must be involved and have unique responsibilities to ensure the ordinance is effective.

**Q: Have any industry programs shown long-term success at reducing the number of invalid alarms?**

A: Yes, Montgomery County, Maryland has been enforcing an ordinance for over a decade which has produced reductions of over 70%. Each year, Montgomery County has produced additional reductions in alarm responses despite more than a 300% increase in registered alarms. Gainesville and Alachua County, Florida, in five years of enforcement have produced reductions of 68 % and 72%. These municipalities actually chose to lower fees, as the goal was alarm reduction, not revenue generation. Charlotte, N.C., which enacted an ordinance with stiff penalties against chronic abusers, showed a 30% reduction in invalid alarms after one year, with reductions up to 48% in the fourth year. There are many other examples of successful cities.

**Q: Does issuing permits do anything to solve the invalid alarm problem, or is it merely a means to support the bureaucracy created to deal with the problem?**

A: Alarm permits or registration fees are a very effective tool that affix responsibility for the system and can be used by communities to manage alarm systems and address those citizens who are not responsible users. Many cities have very successfully implemented a no permit/no response ordinance. This approach increases permit revenues AND reduces police dispatches.

**Q: Some say the Model Ordinance doesn't work because it leaves the city and police department holding too many responsibilities, like tracking. Shouldn't the brunt of responsibility for fulfilling a private civil contract fall on the two private parties that agreed to the contract?**

A: The premise for the question is invalid. Citizens and law enforcement rely on private companies to provide safety and security products and services that are proven to enhance public safety. Police have recommended for many years that citizens install alarm systems. The alarm response policy is an issue to be resolved between the

citizens and their law enforcement agency. The Model Ordinance also places many responsibilities on the alarm companies.

However, many agencies have elected to use a 3<sup>rd</sup> party company to administer their ordinances. These municipalities share in the revenue generated by the ordinance. With this method of administration, 100% of enforcement, and in some cases response costs, are paid by the alarm users. This removes the financial burden on the city and still allows the department to maintain a larger contingent of officers due to the revenue stream generated by permits and fines.

**Q: Do steep fines stop the problem?**

A: Escalating fines have demonstrated results by dramatically reducing invalid alarms among chronic abusers in many municipalities. However, steep fines alone fail on a long-term basis because many abusers tend to budget for the fee, regardless of how high the fee becomes. To be most effective, any ordinance or policy should include a point where abusers lose response until documentation can be provided that the alarm has been fixed or the alarm users have been effectively trained.

Fines can be structured to totally offset the cost of police response so that citizens who don't have alarm systems don't bear any of the cost.

**Q: Results are not sustainable, are they?**

A: Nationally, the alarm rate (alarms per customer per year) have steadily declined the past 10 years. This is due in part to efforts like the Model Ordinance, but primarily due to efforts by the industry to employ proven tactics such as enhanced verification and new equipment standards.

**Q: Enhanced Call Verification (ECV) is a filtering process, not a “verification” process, isn't it?**

A: ECV is designed to drive down invalid alarms. It has been demonstrated that one call to a location reduces invalid alarm calls to police by 75%, and when two calls are made the reduction is 90%.

**Q: Don't statistics demonstrate that 60-80% of alarm activations occurred at premises with one or two alarms a year?**

A: Industry data demonstrate that 80% of invalid alarms come from about 20% of users. The 60-80% figure cited is drawn from a small statistical sample that only included three communities – Salem, Oregon; Arlington, Texas; and Seattle, Washington. In Los Angeles, a city study indicated that nearly 100% of alarm activations were generated from approximately 20% of protected properties.

**Q: Can't private guard response provide a quicker response?**

A: Law enforcement response is critical to the crime deterrent affect of alarm systems. A police response provides the best-trained personnel to quickly and safely deal with any incident after arriving on scene.

There are additional issues with private response. For example, many states or local governmental have no standards or training for guards. Even when training is required, it is typically fewer than 40 hours.

On the other hand, law enforcement personnel typically have hundreds of hours of training, and when dispatched, can send one or more officers as required. When agencies indicate that they will no longer respond, they usually caution that untrained citizens should not respond alone.

**Q: Doesn't the alarm industry resort to scare tactics and inflammatory statements to overstate its case?**

A: This accusation has been leveled in some areas but is just not true.

Alarm companies have a contractual relationship with their customers and in most cases that contract calls for the dispatch of authorities to any alarm activation which cannot be verified. If this changes it is a legal requirement of the company to notify the alarm user. In many cases citizens have no idea they are about to lose law enforcement response and our notification naturally causes a strong response.

The alarm industry provides accurate and thorough data to support a complete and comprehensive discussion of an important public safety policy issue. We are committed to public safety and working cooperatively with law enforcement, local officials and members of the public to ensure the needs of the community are addressed and effective solutions to alarm management issues implemented.

The policy of the industry is to make citizens aware of proposed alarm response policies and encourage them to participate in the public policy process.

**Q: Haven't invalid alarms decreased under verified response?**

A: Of course! When law enforcement stops responding you would expect a 90-100% reduction in alarm dispatches. According to Dr. Kelly Buck, a Ph.D. sociologist at the U.S. Department of Defense with more 20 years of experience in applied social science research, "if a policy is put in place where law enforcement is advised not to respond to all intrusion alarms when prior to that policy they did respond, by default, the number of law enforcement responses to false alarms will decrease. One does not need data to know that law enforcement resources would be saved as a result.... Another outcome, by default, of verified response policies would have to be that law enforcement may not have timely responses to as many crimes that trigger intrusion alarms as they did prior to

implementation of verified response....”

**Q: Doesn't the Salt Lake City data demonstrate that verified response did not affect crime rates?**

A: Salt Lake City actually reported an increase in burglaries of 25% against alarmed properties in the first two full years after the policy went into effect and the Uniform Crime Report from the FBI website confirms that. The real unanswered question is why? According to Dr. Kelly Buck, “The data and analyses ... are insufficient to draw any reliable conclusions about the presence or absence of an impact on crime rates from implementation of verified response. They are deficient in at least two ways: 1) outcomes used to indicate positive or negative impact of verified response policies, 2) insufficient data for measuring the effects of verified response policies on crime rates.”

*It is interesting to note that in both Arvada, Colorado and Eugene, Oregon, cities that have adopted restrictive response policies, there have been almost identical increases in the burglary rate. These increases are many times greater than the regional or national increases experienced and reported by the FBI in the Uniform Crime Report. They are also many times greater than surrounding agencies that continue to respond to alarm calls.*

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:**

Dr. Buck also stated, “...**Verified response policies may ultimately result in a higher rate of intrusion-related crimes due to undermining the deterrent effect of certainty and timeliness of detection and response.**”

Dr. Kelly Buck's complete paper on Verified Response statistics is available on line at [www.siacinc.org](http://www.siacinc.org) .



*The Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC) is a non-profit organization formed to represent one voice for the alarm industry on alarm management issues. SIAC's primary charter is to significantly reduce calls for service and improve the lines of communication with law enforcement and end users to ensure the safety and security of more than 30 million alarm system users in homes and businesses throughout North America.*