

# City of San Diego Police False Alarm Program

## **Your responsibility as an alarm user:**

As the alarm user, it is your responsibility to make sure your equipment is in working order, and to ensure that all staff and individuals who have access to your alarm system are properly trained on how to use it. This can be as simple as performing routine maintenance on your equipment, keeping motion sensors clear, and checking the alarm system battery to avoid system malfunctions.

As a courtesy, the San Diego Police Department will attempt to remind permit holders by mail that their annual alarm permit is close to expiring and a renewal payment is due. This is a courtesy only, and is not required by law. Ultimately, it is the permit holder's responsibility to remember to renew their annual permit, regardless if a courtesy notice is received or not.

## **Before you hire an alarm company:**

Check out the Consumer Guide to Alarm Companies, provided by the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services, available at [www.bsis.ca.gov/forms\\_pubs/alarmco.pdf](http://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/alarmco.pdf)

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Who is required to have an alarm permit/license?**

Everyone operating an alarm system inside the city limits is required to register their alarm system. An alarm system means any single mechanical or electrical device used to detect unauthorized entry into, or detect fire and/or harmful gas in any building or other structure. The system alerts others to possible commission of an unlawful act within a building, or alerts of fire or harmful gas, and that when triggered, emits a sound, or transmits a signal or message that is intended to evoke a law enforcement response or emergency responder. This includes any audible alarm or other alarm system whether or not it is monitored by an alarm business, alarm agent, or alarm user; or installed by an alarm business or alarm user. The fire alarm user permit is for systems monitored by an alarm company.

A permit is required by the Police Department if your home or commercial building is monitored for burglary/robbery.

A permit is required by the Fire-Rescue Department if your home or commercial building is monitored for fire/smoke or harmful gas.

If an alarm user has one alarm system protecting more than one address, a separate permit shall be required for each address.

### **Who is exempt from having to pay an alarm permit fee?**

**The following organizations must obtain an alarm permit, but are exempt from the permit fee:** Any federal, state, county or municipal organizations, or any non-profit organization, organized and qualified under the laws of the United States or California as a tax-exempt organization. The issuance of a tax-exempt certificate by the California State Franchise Tax Board shall be conclusive evidence of such exempt status. In order to obtain a free permit, the non-profit organization shall file with the permit application a written statement setting forth the necessary facts including documentation in support of any claim for exemption from payment of the permit fees (IRS 501 (c) (3) documents).

## **How do I obtain an alarm permit?**

### **For the Police Alarm Permit:**

To obtain a police alarm permit within the City of San Diego, create a permit and pay online here:

<https://sdpdalarmpermits.sandiego.gov/>

You may also mail the payment/permit application to:

San Diego Police Department Permits and Licensing

P.O. Box 121431, MS 735; San Diego, CA 92112

Make payable to "City Treasurer".

Or apply in person at San Diego Police Department 1401 Broadway; San Diego, CA 92101 (E Street front counter; payments accepted Monday through Thursday, 8am to 3:30 pm).

**To make a payment on an existing permit/account: Input your account number and/or invoice/password in the white boxes located on right side of the screen that states "Account #" and "Password/Invoice". Then press "submit" to be taken to the payment screen.**

### **For the Fire Alarm Permit:**

To obtain a fire/harmful gas alarm permit within the City of San Diego, create a permit and pay online here: <https://sdpdalarmpermits.sandiego.gov>

You may also mail the permit application to, or apply in person at:

San Diego Fire-Rescue Department; Attn: Fire Alarms Clerk

600 B Street Suite 1300

San Diego, CA 92101

## **What if I move or close my business?**

Alarm system permits shall not be transferable from one person or location to another. Please email our office at [AlarmAdministrator@pd.sandiego.gov](mailto:AlarmAdministrator@pd.sandiego.gov), or call us at (619) 531-2250, to have your permit canceled so you are not responsible for that location any longer. Also, be sure to notify your alarm company you plan to move. Your alarm company does not alert the San Diego Police Department when you cancel your account with them. You must contact each separately. The new occupants must apply for a new permit if the alarm system is still in the home and plugged into electricity. It is recommended that you work with your alarm company.

## **I already moved into new home/business and it has a burglar alarm. That owner told me he/she had a permit. Is that permit valid for me?**

No. You are required to obtain your own permit for service.

## **How often do I have to renew my residential/commercial Police alarm permit?**

The permit is valid for one year, and must be renewed yearly. We no longer issue two year Police alarm permits.

## **What are the alarm user fees and penalties?**

You will never be charged for an alarm activation that is not false. The SDMC ordinance allows charges for false alarms only.

**The cost of a residential/commercial Police alarm permit is \$10.00 for one year (and is a yearly annual payment). A Fire alarm permit is \$18.00 for two years.**

As an alarm user, you are subject to fees and penalties for false alarms as follows:

False Police alarm activations within a 365 day period will result as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Occurrence: \$100.00

2<sup>nd</sup> Occurrence: \$200.00

3<sup>rd</sup> Occurrence: \$300.00

4<sup>th</sup> Occurrence: \$400.00

5<sup>th</sup> Occurrence or more: \$500.00

No Permit Penalty: \$300.00

**As you can see, there are no free false alarm responses/fee waivers for residential/commercial false alarms.**

### **What are the penalties if I have too many false alarms?**

A notice of violation will be issued and a fine will be assessed for the first through fifth false alarm. The sixth false alarm will result in the revocation of your alarm system permit. A notice of revocation will be issued, and a fine will be assessed; and for each additional false alarm after notice of revocation, a fine will be assessed. This includes false alarms that occur when the alarm system permit is in the process of reinstatement and during the time when the revocation of the permit is appealed in accordance with section 33.0501 SDMC.

Excessive responses to false alarms may result in a misdemeanor citation.

### **How long after my alarm system is installed do I have until I am required to have an alarm permit?**

You have 30 days in which to obtain a permit for your alarm system. However, some alarm companies will not allow you to begin using your system until you provide them with the permit number from the San Diego Police Department. Once you receive your permit number, be sure to inform your alarm company of your permit number.

### **When will my alarm permit expire?**

An alarm system permit shall expire on the last day of the twelfth month following the issuance of the permit. For example: You purchased your alarm permit on July, 7, 2021. It will expire July 31, 2022.

### **What happens if I forget to renew my alarm permit?**

If you have not renewed your alarm permit within 30 days of the permit expiring, your alarm permit will be inactivated. Your alarm will be considered unpermitted, and will be subject to unpermitted alarm penalty fees/false alarm fees.

### **Why didn't I receive an invoice reminding me my permit renewal was due?**

San Diego Permits and Licensing will attempt to send courtesy reminders regarding permit renewals approximately 30 days before the permits are set to expire. These notices of expiring alarms are sent out the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of each month. This is a courtesy only, and it is not required by law to send the letters. We cannot guarantee you will receive a courtesy reminder. It is ultimately the permit holder's responsibility to remember when their permit expires, and when permit payments are due.

## **Do I need an alarm permit if I live in an apartment complex or condominium?**

Yes, you will need a permit if your unit has its own alarm system panel and you have an alarm system for inside your unit only. However, the building owner is responsible for any alarm systems he/she has installed in the common areas in your building, and will need to obtain a permit for each alarm system control panel in the complex.

## **What is a police false alarm and how are they determined?**

False alarm means any activation of an alarm system that results in a call for service where an emergency situation does not exist. It includes activations caused by mechanical or electrical failure, malfunction, improper installation, sensor sensitivity, accidental tripping (both human and/or animal), misuse, or negligent maintenance by an alarm business, alarm agent, or alarm user.

A false alarm can also mean police responded to an alarm incident and found no reasonable evidence of a crime, attempted crime, or suspicious activity.

False alarms do not include activations caused by extreme weather conditions, telephone line problems, or any other extraordinary factors over which the alarm business, alarm agent, or alarm user has no direct or indirect control. It **does not** include activations where the call for service is cancelled by an alarm user, authorized responder, or alarm agent, and law enforcement does not arrive at the alarm site.

A fire false alarm **does** include activations where the call for service is cancelled by the alarm user, authorized responder or alarm agent, and law enforcement, or emergency responders do not arrive at the site. If Fire-Rescue is dispatched and they leave the Fire Station, the activation is still considered a false alarm even if the call for service is cancelled. Not arriving at the site does not excuse the false alarm.

## **Why does the City fine for false alarms?**

Every year, the San Diego Police Department, and San Diego Fire Department, respond to thousands of false alarms within our community, tying up valuable resources. False alarms take officers away from real emergencies that are occurring.

Major causes of false alarms include:

Doors/windows not properly closed

Pets, kids, neighbors, relatives, visitors, repair workers, cleaning crews, housekeepers

User error/accidental activations by property

Equipment malfunctions/installation or service errors.

## **What does the City hope to accomplish by enforcing the false alarm ordinance?**

The City wants to substantially reduce the number of false alarms that Fire-Rescue and the SDPD respond to.

## **How can I prevent a false alarm activation?**

False alarm response is very costly and dangerous because it diverts police officers from community policing and crime prevention efforts. Steps you can take to prevent unwanted alarm activations include:

Multiple zone triggers is a great tool for reducing false alarms. This means your alarm company will only contact police if more than one device (such as a motion sensor, door sensor, window sensor, etc.) is activated instead of just one. If you are concerned about preventing false alarms in your home or

business, contact your alarm company and ask them about setting up multiple zone triggers for your alarm system.

Be sure all alarm users in your home/business are thoroughly trained before attempting to use the alarm system. Hold monthly training/refreshers sessions to ensure alarm users are aware of any changes to the system, the importance of careful pre-arming checks; designated entry/exit doors; proper opening/closing procedures; correct pass codes and arming codes; and rehearse how to cancel accidental activations.

Be aware of the weather forecast. A slightly open window or door, and a strong gust of wind can trigger your alarm. A draft can also trigger a false alarm.

Watch out for holiday-related false alarms. Be careful with the placement of seasonal decorations; thoroughly train temporary holiday house guests/employees; watch last minute schedule changes leading to inexperienced employees arming or disarming your system. Long hours and/or holiday parties can result in careless use of your alarm system by employees.

Be careful with the placement of items that can move or trigger your alarm sensor, causing false alarms (fans, heaters, hanging signs, seasonal decorations, balloons, curtains, plants, pets, etc.). Remember certain pets can jump.

Lock all protected doors and windows.

Contact your alarm company if you plan on remodeling, changing phone systems, installing ceiling fans, etc.

Confirm special consideration has been given to the installation of motion detectors in high bay areas with overhead doors, large exhaust fans, or ceiling vents which allow entry of birds/rodents. Discuss with your alarm provider whether your location's environment requires specially designed and installed motion detectors that will not activate a false alarm due to birds, pets, wildlife, etc. Consider glass break detectors, open/close sensors, or confining pets to an area without detectors.

If you have pets, talk to your alarm company about "pet-proof" sensors and other options.

Rodents can trigger a false alarm by coming to your window. If you have a problem, call a professional to get rid of the critters.

Ensure all doors and windows are secure and locked before arming your system. Windows and doors/door handles that are loose and wiggle enough to set off your alarm need to either be tightened up, or have your alarm's sensitivity adjusted. If your door or window won't secure properly, don't set the alarm (this includes loose-fitting, damaged, or warped doors and windows).

Clean your house. Sensors can be activated by insects, spider webs, dust, and debris.

If your fireplace is in use, make sure that any motion detectors in the area will be bypassed, or check with your alarm company for possible adjustments so heat sensors won't be triggered.

Ensure that floor mounted contacts are not being used on overhead/rollup doors. Instead, use track-mounted contacts by placing a track-mounted contact on BOTH sides of the door tracks at 4-5 feet on the one side and at 7-8 feet on the other side. Require that BOTH contacts must be activated to trigger the alarm. This will reduce and/or eliminate false alarms due to wind or shaking of the door. Have your alarm provider check the type and condition of contacts installed on your overhead doors.

Don't change pass codes without advising your central monitoring station.

Don't change pass codes and arming codes without advising the appropriate authorized users.

Your central monitoring station should not request a police dispatch for power outages, low battery signals or loss of telephone connections.

If you believe your alarm system is not working properly, immediately contact your alarm provider.

Service and maintain your system (including batteries) regularly before false alarms occur.

If your business requires wireless hold-up protection, use dual-activation devices only.

Upgrade old alarm systems to current equipment conforming to Security Industry Association (SIA) false alarm prevention standards, further reducing false alarms.

### **How do I know if I have had a false alarm?**

A letter concerning false alarms that have been logged against your account and permit will be mailed to you. You will have ten (10) business days to provide satisfactory evidence that your alarm permit activation did not meet the qualifications for a false alarm under the City of San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 3 Article 3 Division 37; or Chapter 5 Article 5 Division 99 (Fire/Harmful Gas).

### **What if I am traveling/in the hospital/away when the activation occurred?**

You have the option to designate another person to act on your behalf regarding your alarm activation. You have the option to notify your alarm company with the name and contact information of who you would like to have authority to make alarm response decisions for you should you be traveling, in the hospital, away, etc. You have the option to grant this authority through your alarm company on a temporary or more permanent basis. You must keep your alarm company updated on any changes.

### **What if I disagree with an assessed fine?**

If you disagree with an assessed fine, you have the option to appeal the fines assessed in accordance with the San Diego Municipal Code.

### **How do I appeal a false alarm fine?**

To appeal a Police false alarm fee, you must send a letter of appeal within ten (10) calendar days of receiving an alarm permit revocation letter to:

**San Diego Police Department, Permits and Licensing**  
**Attn: Administrative Hearing Coordinator**  
1401 Broadway, MS 735, San Diego, CA 92101  
Fax: (619) 531-2177

Failure to submit a request for a hearing within ten (10) calendar days of receiving an alarm permit revocation letter terminates the alarm user's right to contest the false alarm or fine or penalty fee. Refer to Chapter 3 Article 3 Division 5 of the San Diego Municipal Code for details on appeal rights and procedures.

<http://docs.sandiego.gov/municode/MuniCodeChapter03/Ch03Art03Division05.pdf>

### **Are there false alarms that will not be considered for appeal?**

The following false alarms will not be considered for appeal:

Disputes with the alarm company. This includes battery, sensor, alarm equipment issues, among other civil issues.

Non-permitted alarm holders who neglected to inquire with the City of San Diego/San Diego Police department to determine if required to obtain an alarm permit to have an alarm system in the City of San Diego. All alarm users have a responsibility to ensure their alarm system is legal and permitted.

Non-permitted false alarms, including alarm users who neglected to remember/document the date of when their permit expires.

Operator error.

Animal activation (pet or wildlife). This includes bugs that may get into sensors, spiders building webs. It is your responsibility to periodically inspect the sensors to determine whether this could be a problem.

Ask your alarm company for ideas to minimize these types of activations.

Wind. Wind flapping back drapery or other items that set off a motion sensor. It is your responsibility to make sure there is nothing in your home that could move on its own.

Heat/Air conditioning. Sensors set off by a gust of air coming from a furnace/air conditioning.

### **What your alarm company should do for you?**

Except for panic, duress or hold-up activations, your alarm company must attempt to verify every alarm signal **before** requesting response from law enforcement. SDPD requires your alarm monitoring company make two phone calls to you, or to your designees', **before** SDPD will format a call for service. If it is determined that an alarm signal is false, your alarm monitoring company **MUST** immediately attempt to cancel the police dispatch. **DO NOT LET YOUR ALARM COMPANY TELL YOU THAT THIS CANNOT BE DONE.** You cannot personally cancel a police dispatch unless you initiated the call to your alarm monitoring company first (we cannot verify your identity over the phone).

### **Can you recommend an alarm company?**

No. We cannot show favoritism to any one alarm company. However, you can contact the State of California Department of Consumer Affairs to assist you in answering questions about alarm systems. [https://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/alarm\\_companies.shtml](https://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/alarm_companies.shtml)

### **How do I file a complaint about my alarm service provider?**

Complaints against your alarm service provider, alarm qualified manager, and/or alarm agent, may be filed with the State of California Department of Consumer Affairs. Complaints include unlicensed activities, contract and installation agreement issues (including rollover or evergreen renewal provisions), and unauthorized monitoring services. To obtain a complaint form or file your complaint online, log on to [www.bsis.ca.gov/consumers/complaints.shtml](http://www.bsis.ca.gov/consumers/complaints.shtml) or call 800-952-5210 to have a complaint form mailed to you.

You may also file a civil claim against your alarm company by contacting the San Diego County Superior Court, Small Claims Advisor.

### **Why can't I file a complaint against my alarm company with the City of San Diego?**

The City of San Diego does not regulate alarm companies. The State of California, Department of Consumer Affairs, has control over the performance of alarm companies, alarm agents, and private patrol companies relating to the installation, repair and monitoring of burglar alarm systems.

### **How does the City calculate the false alarm fees?**

The false alarm fee is based on the actual cost incurred by the City to have SDPD officers respond to the alarm call. The costs include equipment, salary, and other administrative costs incurred by the City.

### **Where does false alarm revenue go?**

Monies collected from permit and false alarm fees are deposited to the City's general fund. The general fund finances services such as public safety, parks and recreation, library services, and trash collection.

**Does the Alarm Ordinance require the Police Officer to leave a “Notice of False Alarm” when they respond to a false alarm?**

No.

**Is my alarm system connected to the San Diego Police Department?**

No. Your alarm system is connected to your alarm monitoring company who in turn calls the SDPD when your alarm is activated.

**Police Officers were not immediately dispatched to check on my ringing alarm. Why?**

Because of the high number of false alarms, and because of other demands, police response to alarm calls is a low priority and response times can vary greatly. Alarm users should contact their alarm company to discuss private security guard services dispatch. This can be a more timely method of getting a response to your burglar alarm and aids the police department by reducing false alarm dispatches.

**My alarm company dispatched SDPD in error. Why was the false alarm bill sent to me, not my alarm company?**

You were provided with the special service by the SDPD, in response to your alarm company’s request for police response. If you did not authorize the dispatch, contact your alarm company and request that they reimburse you for their mistake.

**We don’t know why the alarm went off. What are we supposed to do?**

The alarm system always goes off for a reason. Find out what sensor activated and what caused it to activate. Take steps to ensure that it does not happen again. Call your alarm company for assistance.

**My out of town relatives activated my alarm system. Could the charges be waived?**

No. This is considered user error. Those who have legal access to your location must know how to operate your alarm system.

**An alarm system keeps going off in my neighborhood. Who do I call to report this?**

Contact the SDPD, Alarm Permits at (619) 531-2250. Provide the exact address of the alarm location, the business name or residence owner (if known), and alarm company name (if known).

**I was burglarized on the alarm date. What should I do to delete the date from my false alarm history?**

Contact SDPD Communications Division at (619) 531-2000 to file an investigative report. Press the star when you hear the recorded messages in order to be put in line to speak to a Dispatcher. Once you obtain a case number, contact the alarm administrator at [AlarmAdministrator@pd.sandiego.gov](mailto:AlarmAdministrator@pd.sandiego.gov)

**I instructed my alarm company to contact me first before dispatching SDPD.  
Why did the SDPD officers respond to the alarm activation?**

SDPD officers responded to the alarm activation because your alarm company contacted SDPD and requested officers be dispatched. Contact your alarm company for clarification.

**Do I have to register my car alarm?**

No.