



## East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service

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**In the case of emergency please dial 999**

28 October 2021

### Changes to East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Operational Response Standards

We want to ensure we put our resources in the right place, at the right time to deal with emergencies and help prevent them in the first place.

Following our Planning for a Safer Future public consultation in 2020, we are now bringing in some changes at East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service which will affect some of your members.

We are keen to help businesses and other organisations prepare for these changes and would like your support.

#### Why we are changing

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service average around 9,200 operational responses to incidents each year.

Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems account for 34% of all these calls, of which a huge **96% turn out to be false alarms**. These are often described as ‘unwanted fire signals’.

Of these AFA calls, only 2% in non-domestic premises turn out to be fires - an average of 32 per year. 20 of these do not require any firefighting action because the fire will already be out when the crews arrive. The majority of the others only require a minimum amount of action from our crews, ranging from an item being taken outside to the use of portable extinguishers.

On average, **only one call per year** to an AFA in non-domestic premises is significant enough to need to use main firefighting jets of water or specialist foam.

These AFAs, or Unwanted Fire Signals, divert essential fire service resources from other incidents, with the possibility of delayed attendance at emergencies where lives or property are in danger.

They create unnecessary risk to fire crews and members of the public when fire engines and other appliances are responding under emergency conditions, and are disruptive to work routines for our crews, particularly community and fire safety activity and training.

There is also a financial impact due to salary and vehicle fleet costs, which ultimately are met by the public and businesses who pay taxes and rates.

AFA systems are provided in buildings as part of the solutions needed to manage and reduce the risk to your staff and visitors from fire. The system is provided primarily for the benefit of the building’s management team, to enable them to detect and warn others of a fire and to enable

you to implement your emergency procedures, part of which should include evacuation and calling of the Fire Service.

### **What is changing?**

Because of all of these impacts, our Service will **no longer attend fire alarms operating in low-risk commercial premises, between 0900hrs and 1700hrs Monday to Friday (except bank holidays) unless we receive telephone confirmation that there is a fire.**

Low risk premises are classified as premises with no sleeping risk, such as offices, shops, factories, pubs, clubs and restaurants.

In these premises, when people are present, they are able to confirm there is a fire and call 999 for the fire service; we would then send the appropriate resources to deal with the incident.

When people are not present, such as when businesses are closed typically between 1700hrs and 0900hrs and at weekends and bank holidays, the life risk is very low however the impact on the business may be greater. Therefore at these times we will continue to respond to Automatic Fire Alarms in the normal way.

The changes are due to take effect in April 2022.

### **Responsible Person**

We want to make sure organisations understand that they are responsible for fire safety in business or other non-domestic premises if they are:

- an employer
- the owner
- the landlord
- an occupier
- anyone else with control of the premises, eg a facilities manager, building manager, managing agent or risk assessor

To reduce the number of Unwanted Fire Signals, we need this Responsible Person and other parties involved in the fire alarm industry (alarm designers, installers, maintainers and alarm receiving centres) to adopt a cultural change in fire alarm management and procedures to prevent a false alarm being passed to our Service.

We want to help ensure affected premises have time to review their risk assessments, train their staff and inform their alarm monitoring services and maintainers. A full checklist can be found on our website [www.esfrs.org](http://www.esfrs.org).

Plans are now being developed to work with businesses to reduce the number of Unwanted Fire Signals attended through a range of measures.

We will update our website and you can follow us on social media for the latest information.

If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact us at the address on this letter or using the following details:

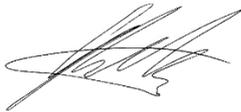
Telephone: 0303 999 1000

Minicom: 01323 462 003

Opening hours: 08:30-17:00 Monday to Thursday and 08:30-16:30 on Fridays.

Email: [enquiries@esfrs.org](mailto:enquiries@esfrs.org)

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'George O'Reilly', written in a cursive style.

George O'Reilly  
Group Manager - Protection