



**NORTH YORKSHIRE  
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

# Automatic Fire Alarms Frequently Asked Questions

## What is an automatic fire alarm?

Automatic fire alarm (also known as automatic fire detection) systems are installed in domestic and non domestic premises. Automatic fire detection provides the means to know that you may have a fire at the earliest possible time. It provides an opportunity to carry out firefighting (because the fire is still small) and the maximum period of time to implement your emergency plan and evacuate residents, staff or any other people in the premises.

## What is North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's response to automatic fire alarms?

From the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 our response will be:

### **Non-Sleeping risk premises**

We will not attend automatic fire alarms between 08:00 and 18:00 at premises where people do **not** sleep, unless a fire has been confirmed. We will still attend automatic fire alarms outside of these hours. Outside of these hours, a response will be made to the premises to investigate the cause of the alarm. Crews will require access to the building and will expect a key holder to be present to gain access. If the crew believe there to be a fire they may make forced entry into the building. If there are no visible signs of a fire and crews can not enter the building they may leave.

These premises include offices, shops and factories (excluding high risk).

### **Sleeping risks and high risk premises**

One fire engine will attend automatic fire alarms at premises where people sleep and some other higher risk premises at all times.

Sleeping risk premises includes, care homes, hospitals, hotels, boarding schools.

High risk premises includes sites with high risk manufacturing processes or storage and buildings of significant historical interest. These are determined (by us) as high risk by assessing premises against a national risk model.

We will also attend automatic fire alarms at schools at all times.

### **Repeat false alarms**

Following dialogue with the responsible person we may not attend specific premises where

there are repeated false alarms from automatic fire alarms and where the causes of these are not being addressed.

### **Domestic premises (private houses, flats, etc.)**

We will still attend automatic fire alarms at domestic premises.

### **What should I do now?**

If you believe this change makes a significant difference to how you will react or need to deal with any fire alarm activation, you should review your fire risk assessment, fire safety arrangements and fire procedures. Following any review you may need to implement amended procedures on what to do in the event of a fire alarm activation. If you do make changes to your procedure you should ensure that all your staff or residents are made aware of your new procedures. We would also advise you practice and conduct fire drills to incorporate your new procedures.

### **What should be in my procedures?**

You should have an emergency plan that is appropriate to your premises and could include;

- How people will be warned if there is a fire;
- What staff should do if they discover a fire;
- How the evacuation of the premises should be carried out;
- Where people should assemble after they have left the premises and procedures for checking whether the premises have been evacuated;
- Identification of key escape routes, how people can gain access to them and escape from them to a place of total safety;
- Arrangements for fighting a fire, if safe to do so
- The duties and identity of staff who have specific responsibilities if there is a fire;
- Arrangements for the safe evacuation of people identified as being especially at risk, such as those with disabilities, lone workers and young persons;
- Any machines/ appliances/processes/power supplies that need to be stopped or isolated if there is a fire;
- Specific arrangements, if necessary, for high fire risk areas;
- Contingency plans for when life safety systems such as evacuation lifts, fire detection and warning systems, sprinklers or smoke control systems are out of order;
- How the fire and rescue service and any other necessary services will be called and who will be responsible for doing this;
- Procedures for meeting the fire and rescue service on their arrival and notifying them of any special risks, e.g. the location of highly flammable materials;
- What training employees need and the arrangements for ensuring that this training is given;
- Phased evacuation plans (where some areas are evacuated while others are alerted but not evacuated until later);and
- Plans to deal with people once they have left the premises.

**If there is a fire we would always advise that you call 999 and a fire engine will be sent, regardless of whether your alarm has activated.**

## **How do I reduce the number of false alarms from my automatic fire alarm system?**

Automatic fire alarm systems are extremely useful in detecting and alerting people that there is a fire, however if not managed properly they can produce false alarms which are disruptive and costly to businesses.

Every effort should be made by people, who have installed and use automatic fire alarm systems, to reduce the likelihood of false activations. False alarms are when the system activates for any other reason than a fire or products of combustion being present.

The most common reasons for false alarms are down to poor maintenance and carelessness. Further advice is available in a government publication 'A guide to reducing the number of false alarms from fire-detection and fire alarm systems', which is available on our website under the Business Safety/ reducing false alarms section

## **Will the risk from fire increase as a result of North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service not attending automatic fire alarms?**

An automatic fire alarm system is not a factor in determining the risk from fire. This risk of fire arises from processes, people and activity within a property. There are very few occasions when an automatic fire alarm system activation is caused by a fire: the overwhelming majority of activations are false alarms.

The management of the system itself, and the safe evacuation from the premises, is the responsibility of the Responsible Person and this is their legal obligation under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

## **How can I contact you if I have questions about fire safety?**

Should you wish to discuss any fire safety matters please contact one of our fire safety departments, you can find their details under the 'contact us' section of our website [www.northyorksfire.gov.uk](http://www.northyorksfire.gov.uk) . Alternatively you can call our Headquarters on 01609 780150, during office hours, and ask to speak to a member of fire safety.