

Operating Guideline # 510

False Alarms

August 11, 2023



PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Operating Guideline (OG) is to establish guidelines to provide the best use of human resources during false alarms.

GUIDELINE:

1. It is the standard practice the Muskoka Lakes Fire Department will respond to all incidents once dispatched - an emergency response cannot be “cancelled” unless it has been proven to be false by a fire service employee who has attended the scene and verified that an emergency response is not required.
2. Upon receiving information that an emergency call is being downgraded to a false alarm by dispatch, police or EMS, the Officer in Charge of any reported responding units and the first apparatus will continue the response. All other apparatus will “hold” in station.
3. The first arriving unit will perform a scene size up using the IRR Format Sheet including the following:
 - a) Building Description / Area Description – noting the size, height, and occupancy
 - b) Description of the Problem – fire conditions or lack of, floor involved, sides seen
 - c) Incident Action Plan – tasks, floor, side (Investigation)
 - d) Objectives – Investigation, checking for extension, 360, # of buildings
 - e) Resources – Cancel, Hold (continue), Upgrade
 - f) Name Command – if large site may think about moving to TAC channel
4. If nothing showing, the members of the first responding apparatus will knock on the door of the property to confirm if there are any occupants. Members should attempt to open the door by hand and prior to entry they shall announce on the radio their intent to enter the home. Members should also announce on the radio if the doors are locked. Members are not authorized to break any door or force entry UNLESS signs of fire or calls for help are heard.
5. Members will perform a 360 degree scan of each building. Members should be prepared to announce “Fire Department” out loud to ensure that they do not startle any occupants. Checking all doors and windows for occupants.
6. Members should have a TIC with them, 4 gas monitor, halligan tool and full SCBA. Members should work in pairs and leave one member at the truck to meet any key holder or any other responding members.
7. Signs of fire include:
 - a) Smoke stained windows or water droplets on inside of windows
 - b) Windows that appear tinted but are brownish black tinted
 - c) Sound of rapid air movement around seals in doors or windows
 - d) Flickering lights inside

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- e) Elevated temperature on windows
- f) Elevated CO levels
- g) coloured exhaust smoke or air from dryer vent areas
- h) persons laying on the floor or in distress

Any noted items should be immediately announced on radio and the incident should be upgraded to a structure fire response.

8. Upon response to a reported false alarm by another party (OPP, dispatch, EMS or occupants), it will be the responsibility of the incident commander to determine if the cause of the alarm was false as defined below:

False Alarm is defined as the activation of any alarm system that summons the fire department, through malfunction, improper maintenance, or the negligence of the owner or lessee of alarm system or of his/her employees or alarm company will result in a false alarm being recorded for the property which may result in fees.

9. Examples of false alarms that may result in possible fees:

- a) An alarm caused by improper installation or maintenance of the fire alarm system. This includes missing backup batteries, loose connection, smoke detectors located within three feet of air vents, chimneys, ceiling fans, or otherwise overly sensitive detectors.
- b) An alarm caused by a power outage or storm, as long as there is no evidence that lightning hit the structure or nearby power lines or telephone lines.
- c) An alarm caused by the alarm user or Alarm Company working on the system or testing the system without notifying the fire department or dispatch.
- d) The occupant conducting a fire drill without notifying the Alarm Company, Dispatch or the Fire Department.
- e) An alarm caused by smoking or vaping near a detector.
- f) An alarm caused by normal cooking where the alarm user could relocate a smoke detector or provide better ventilation.
- g) An alarm caused by dust from construction.
- h) A burglar alarm reported by an alarm company as a fire alarm.
- i) An alarm for which there is no explanation. If a cause for the alarm cannot be identified the alarm system will be assumed to have had malfunctioned

10. False Alarm of the following type requires a senior officer (Deputy Chief or Fire Chief) to be notified by phone while still on scene. A false alarm due to human malicious or intentional and human perceived emergency, these types of false alarms will require record keeping and may require Police or prosecution. This will include alarms caused by unauthorized tampering with a fire alarm system by anyone other than the fire alarm company in a commercial occupancy. If in doubt, call the Fire Chief or Deputy Fire Chief.

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11. False Alarm due to human accidental is when an alarm is triggered by an occupant while performing a task that would be reasonable, for instance failure to open a chimney flue, barbeque smoke causing alarm. In these circumstances if the occupant admits their neglect immediately and is candid these alarms will be recorded however there is no need to inform the Deputy Fire Chief or Fire Chief.

12. For attendance purposes, available firefighters should continue their response to the appropriate fire station to “sign-in” to be eligible for attendance verification up to the time the last fire apparatus has been placed back in service upon return from the incident.

13. Upon response to two false alarms at a residential occupancy in a twenty-four hour period, the Fire Chief or designate can reduce, modify, or deny response to a building.

RESPONSIBILITY:

It is the responsibility of all staff to comply with the provisions of this Operating Guideline.