



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Councilors

From: Rich Olson, City Manager
Eddie Buffaloe, Chief of Police

Date: August 22, 2013

Re: Discussion – Review of False Alarms Calls Received by ECPD

BACKGROUND:

Over the years, the Elizabeth City Police Department, like many other law enforcement agencies across the state and nation, responded to alarm calls at local business that were “false” in nature. Every alarm call received must be treated as if an actual crime is occurring and responded to accordingly in the protection of life and property. Therefore, responding to unfounded calls takes up time and resources that could be used elsewhere. This creates an officer safety issue for police officers in their normal scope of duties as well as a safety issue for the public that we serve.

The creation and implementation of a false alarm policy could aid the Police Department in reducing the number of false alarm calls received within the City of Elizabeth City. As a part of policy, the Elizabeth City Police Department would designate an Alarm Reduction Unit to provide public awareness on false alarm issues and the impact these calls have on our local emergency response personnel including police, fire, and EMS. Local business owners/alarm users would then be encouraged to take the steps needed in reducing the chance of their security systems generating a false alarm. Pursuant to the desires of City Council, a fee schedule could be imposed upon business owners/alarm users who have an excessive number of false alarm calls generated on a regular basis.

ANALYSIS:

The following table shows a breakdown of alarm calls received by the Elizabeth City Police Department in the last three years:

Years	Alarm Calls Cleared by Using "False Cancel Code"	Alarm Calls Determined to be FALSE	Alarm Calls Determined to be ACTUAL (Open Door, Busted Window, etc)	Lifeline EMS Assist Calls	Total
2010	117 = 7%	1,336 = 85%	102 = 6%	2%	1,555
2011	127 = 7%	1,456 = 86%	101 = 6%	1%	1,681
2012	99 = 5%	1,404 = 84%	149 = 9%	2%	1,652
3 Year Total	343 = 7%	4,196 = 85%	352 = 7%	60 = 1%	4,951

The table above indicates that the vast majority (a total of 85%) of all alarm calls received by the Elizabeth City Police Department in the last three years were *false* in nature. If the average call takes approximately fifteen minutes to complete (which would include patrol units responding to check the premises, contacting the key holder and waiting for them to arrive, then clearing the call with Central), one can then surmise that 62,940 minutes (or 1,049 hours) were spent in responding to false alarms within the City. It is the protocol of Central Communications/911 Dispatch to dispatch two patrol units to *every* alarm call for safety reasons. This results in two officers (out of a *minimum* shift strength of only six officers per squad) being dispatched to alarm calls that, 85 percent of the time, are false. Ultimately, this is time and resources spent that could be used in more effective and efficient ways.

Time spent responding to false alarms could be potentially harmful to someone who is in real danger and needs actual police assistance. Therefore, business owner/alarm users need to exercise due diligence by bearing the responsibility of excessive false alarm calls received by police. A study of other law enforcement agencies throughout North Carolina (including the cities of Greenville and Fayetteville) indicates that these cities have benefited from implementing a false alarm policy and also imposing a fee schedule for those businesses/alarm users who repeatedly generate false alarm calls.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

City staff recommends that the number of false alarm calls received by the Elizabeth City Police Department be reviewed by City Council and a discussion be held regarding this matter.