

# Alarm Info

## Alarms in Creve Coeur

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The Creve Coeur Police Department is proud that its citizens are willing to take a proactive step in protecting their homes and businesses by installing alarm systems. These systems can protect a residence/business from burglary, vandalism, and in some instances can assist with medical alerts.

The Creve Coeur Police Department handled 1,510 burglar alarm calls in 2012, 1,603 in 2011 and 1,625 in 2010. Statistics from the International Association of Police Chiefs show that 98% of the time these alarms are false, and create a great burden on the local police departments (Engebretson, 2008).

False alarms can be defined as human errors, technological errors, and severe weather which cause the system to signal an alarm when there isn't one wasting valuable resources. These alarms negatively affect the police department because "they consume officer time, waste fuel, increase the risk of accidents, cause wear and tear on equipment, reduce police service to areas with a greater need for officer presence, and over time erode officer caution" (Ohlhausen Research, Inc., 1993).

In an effort to make responding to alarm calls more effective, and less costly for the police department the City established an ordinance regarding false alarms, with the penalty being a fine:

### Current Creve Coeur Ordinance: SECTION 210.700:

#### FALSE ALARMS SERVICE CHARGE

- A. All false alarms to which the Police Department responds shall result in the following service charges:
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| 1. First (1st) and second (2nd) false alarm per calendar year | No Charge |
| 2. Third (3rd) false alarm per calendar year                  | \$25.00   |
| 3. Each subsequent false alarm per calendar year              | \$50.00   |
- B. Upon determination by the Chief of Police that a second (2nd) false alarm has occurred in the calendar year, the Chief of Police shall send a notice to the alarm user and upon a third (3rd) false alarm and subsequent false alarm per calendar year shall notify the Director of Finance who shall cause an invoice of the appropriate service charge to be sent to the alarm user.
- C. The Chief of Police shall cancel any notice or service charge upon satisfactory proof by the alarm user that a particular alarm falls within the exceptions enumerated in Section 623.020.
- D. Willful refusal to pay the service charge within thirty (30) days of notice shall constitute a violation of Sections 623.010 through 623.040, the City shall prove, in addition to the willful refusal to pay, that the service charge was properly imposed.  
(R.O. 2008 §18-10; Ord. No. 1565 §1, 2-8-93; Ord. No. 2133 §3, 6-11-01)

## Ways to Avoid False Alarms

We realize that paying fines for false alarms can be expensive. Here are several helpful tips on how to prevent false alarms:

- **Utilize a brief familiarization period:** Following the installation of a new security system, many security companies will allow a familiarization period. During this period, no signals received at the monitoring center will be dispatched to the police department or other

authorities. False alarms that occur during this period will not have repercussions and give the user a great opportunity to get familiar with the system.

- **Appropriately train those with access to the home/business security system:** Employees (for business systems), family members, babysitters, relatives, neighbors, cleaning crews, repairman, and any other person that has permission to be in the home or business, should be appropriately trained on how to use the system. This includes understanding how to arm/disarm the system, knowledge of alarm codes and passwords, and the process for cancelling an inadvertent alarm activation.
- **Install a security system with two-way communication capabilities:** Some security keypads utilize two-way voice technology that enables the alarm dispatcher to hear what is happening in the home. This allows the homeowner to communicate directly to the monitoring center whether a police dispatch is necessary.
- **Require dual verification:** Many security monitoring companies will have access to audio or video resources. Following an alarm activation, requiring the monitoring center to obtain an audio or visual confirmation before dispatching authorities will help reduce false alarms.
- **Conduct a short debriefing after a false alarm occurs:** After a false alarm occurs, it's important to take the time to determine what triggered the alarm and to implement measures to ensure the action is avoided in the future. If the cause of the false alarm cannot be determined, users should be particularly cautious.
- **Perform occasional maintenance:** Users should perform occasional maintenance to ensure that all sensors, detectors, cameras, and any other security components are secured, clean, and working as designed. Excessive dust, spider webs, and loose sensors and detectors can all be the source of false alarms.
- **Other ways to reduce false alarms:**
  - Ensure all windows and doors are secure before setting the alarm
  - Ensure the security company is licensed and reputable
  - Spray insect repellent around sensors and detectors twice a year
  - Periodically test the security system to ensure equipment is working appropriately
  - Ensure that panic buttons or other emergency activation features are out of the reach of children
  - Make certain that the monitoring center has current contact information and that call lists and emergency contacts are accurate
  - Check the batteries of any wireless devices and the backup power to the primary keypad
  - Designate an area in the home/business for the security user manual and ensure contact information for the monitoring system is accessible
  - Be mindful of environmental changes (new pet, plants, HVAC systems, new decorations, etc.) that may impact the security system
  - Use deadbolt locks
  - Contact a professional exterminator if rodents, insects, or other pests are a repeated problem
  - Inform the alarm company or monitoring center if you expect to be away from the home/business for an extended period of time

For further information on security measures, contact the Crime Prevention Office at 314-442-2075 and an Officer can help you with a home/business security assessment.

## References

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Engbretson, J. (2008). The Truth About False Alarms. *Business Source Premier*, 42-46.

Ohlhausen Research, Inc. (1993). False Alarm Perspectives: A Solution-Oriented Resource. *International Association of Chiefs of Police*, 1-71.

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