

## **Falmouth Fire-EMS Operating Guideline**

### **Response to Buildings with Sprinkler Systems**

**Objective:** To guide fire companies in their response to structures with sprinkler systems.

**General Information:**

There are many homes and businesses in the Town of Falmouth with sprinkler systems. Not all buildings with a sprinkler system have Knox Boxes on them to hold keys and emergency contact information. We may arrive at buildings where sprinkler flow is evident and there is no access. Every precaution should be taken to limit any damage to a building.

**Guidelines:**

1. The normal response to a residential or commercial sprinkler activation alarm is the same response for automatic fire alarms (see Response to Automatic Fire Alarms SOG). A residential sprinkler alarm will bring 2 Engines, 1 Aerial, 1 Ambulance (if available and in town) and 1 Chief / Duty Officer. A 3<sup>rd</sup> Engine will be added to Commercial buildings.
2. Unless directed by the Incident Commander, Apparatus will respond and park as follows:
  - a) First Arriving Engine – Attack Engine – Just past or just shy of the front of residence giving aerial room to take the front (“address”) or driveway.
  - b) Second Due Engine – Supply Engine – Stage at the closest fire hydrant and prepare to hook to hydrant and lay in to Attack Engine.
  - c) Third Due Engine (Commercial Alarms only) – C-side and/or Sprinkler Fire Department Connection (FDC). If no C-side access stage at 2<sup>nd</sup> closest fire hydrant.
  - d) First Due Aerial – Driveway (if room) or front side of the building (the “address”).
  - e) First Due Ambulance – Main road near front of residence on the hospital side of the scene, keeping clear of fire hydrants and other locations where responding fire apparatus will be parking.

3. The first arriving personnel (minimum of 2 interior firefighters with SCBA, hand tools, TIC, meter) shall form an investigation group and check the annunciator panel to ascertain the location of any alarm. If Command is not yet established the first arriving personnel will establish a Mobile Command until later-arriving personnel can set up command outside (see Incident Command SOG). If the building does not have a fire alarm panel than the investigation group will go to the sprinkler room.
4. If the building is locked (such as after working hours for commercial buildings), the fire company shall attempt to enter the building, without damage, to determine whether a fire exists.
  - a) If, by exterior check no apparent fire exists, companies may wait to enter a locked building for a reasonable period while Fire Alarm attempts to locate a responsible party who may provide entry to the building.
  - b) If a party cannot be located within a reasonable period, companies may enter the building to verify no existence of fire. In entering a locked building, companies should use forcible entry techniques, which will best allow them to re-secure the building should they need to.
  - c) If forced entry is to be made contact Fire Alarm and request a Falmouth Police Officer to the scene for documentation and a witness.
  - d) If forcible entry is used, it must be written on the Owner Acknowledgement Form and left at the scene.
5. Once the location of the alarm is identified, the investigation group (or another group assigned by the Incident Commander) shall then proceed to the indicated area to investigate the potential cause(s).
6. A 2<sup>nd</sup> group called Panel Group may replace the initial group at the alarm panel and await further instructions.
  - a.) Once building is confirmed to be fully evacuated the Incident Commander may request the panel be silenced.
  - b.) The panel is not reset until the Incident Commander requests it to be.
7. After checking the location identified by the alarm panel or sprinkler room, the investigation group shall take the necessary action.
  - a) Notify command of the situation found
  - b) If confirmed sprinkler flow notify command. If no fire or obvious emergency, ask Command to have alarm panel silenced.

- c) If action is needed, work with Command to perform steps needed (shut down sprinkler system, gate valve, etc.)
  - d) If no apparent problem, request to Command that the alarm be reset.
- 8. An additional group(s) may be sent in by the Incident Commander to assist in the investigation. This is often done for large structures or buildings with multiple floors or businesses. If there are multiple investigation groups, each group will be given a number. For example: Investigation Group 1, Investigation Group 2, Investigation Group 3, etc. With a confirmed sprinkler flow it might be necessary to have an investigation group check the entire building looking for an activated sprinkler head or a break in the sprinkler pipe.
- 9. It is important that the fire alarm not be silenced until crews have determined that there is not an emergency.
- 10. It is important that the fire alarm not be reset until the location of the alarm has been checked or, if no location is given, that the entire building has been checked.
- 11. It is desired that no sprinkler system has been shut down before the Fire-EMS Department has arrived on scene.
  - a) If the sprinkler system is shut down before arrival of Falmouth Fire-EMS, Command should document this in the narrative section of the run report.
  - b) Command should let occupant know the possible issues that can arise by shutting down a sprinkler system prior to our arrival. These range from shutting off the water that might be extinguishing or holding back a fire, to protecting the building should a fire spread.
- 12. If the sprinkler flow alarm is caused by an alarm company being present on-scene please note this in the incident narrative and code the fire call under the call type: "Alarm Company on Scene". If possible, document the alarm company in the report narrative.
- 13. Once the situation has been brought under control the Incident Commander will notify dispatch and advise them briefly on the steps taken to restore the problem. All units will be released by the Incident Commander.
- 14. If the sprinkler flow alarm or the sprinkler system itself is not able to be reset the Incident Commander will speak to a representative of the building and advise them of the situation and ask that they

contact their sprinkler company to check the system. A fire watch may be necessary, based on the number of occupants of the building (example: nursing home, senior housing, etc.).

15. Once all units are in service the Incident Commander will clear all units and terminate Command.

These guidelines may be changed or altered by the Fire Chief at any time.

## **A. COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE**

1. Company Shall Make Entry Into The Building Within A Reasonable Time Frame. If the building is locked (such as after working hours), the fire company shall attempt to enter the building, without damage, to determine whether a fire exists.
2. If, by exterior check no apparent fire exists, companies may wait to enter a locked building for a reasonable period while the Alarm Office attempts to locate a responsible party who may provide entry to the building (see #6 below).
3. If a party cannot be located within a reasonable period, companies must enter the building to verify no existence of fire. In entering a locked building, companies should use forcible entry techniques, which will best allow them to re-secure the building should they need to (see #4 below).
  - i. If forced entry is to be made contact dispatch and request a Falmouth Police Officer to the scene for documentation and a witness.

## **B. RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE**

1. Company shall enter the building if it is occupied and the occupant permits entry. If the building is unoccupied, the company officer shall determine the need to enter the structure, only after a thorough exterior search has been conducted. The officer should attempt to make a reasonable determination as to whether a fire exists on the interior prior to making entry to an unoccupied residence.
  - i. If forced entry is to be made contact dispatch and request a Falmouth Police Officer to the scene for documentation and a witness.
2. Once security of an unoccupied structure is breached, that structure must either be secured or left with a responsible party before the fire company can leave the scene. If the officer can reasonably determine that no fire exists on the interior, the officer may return to in-service status.
3. Upon securing from the incident scene, the company officer shall report via radio or other communication device:
  - i. There is no apparent indication of fire
  - ii. The building is secure or a responsible party is present.

## **C. IF INTERIOR INSPECTION FINDS NO FIRE**

1. Fire Companies May Return to In-Service Status Immediately After Securing the Building.
2. If no responsible party is present, fire companies must be sure that the building is reasonably locked so as to prevent entry from an unwanted intruder. Therefore, fire companies should attempt to enter buildings using methods which will limit damage to the building and which will

afford them a way to re-secure the property. (upper floor window, door; entry from fenced area, etc.)

3. Upon Leaving, The Company Officer Shall Report Via Radio:
  - a. The Status of the system (in-service or out-of-service).
  - b. The building is secured, or a responsible party has arrived.

**D. WHEN INSIDE, FIRE COMPANIES MAY "NEUTRALIZE" (Turn off) THE SPRINKLER OR FIRE ALARM SYSTEM**

1. If a building representative is present, fire companies should allow them to carry 'out the process of neutralizing the system. If done by the fire company, this will usually be limited to (1) turning off the sprinkler alarm valve, or (2) turning off a riser to the sprinkler system, or (3) silencing the audible fire detection alarm, or (4) placing the fire/sprinkler system on city disconnect. However, in any situation, the fire company should not commit unnecessary damage to a system in order to neutralize it.
2. If a fire has occurred, a sprinkler system should not be shut down unless the fire is knocked down and an Officer is assigned to remain, with radio, at the shut-off valve.
3. Should the alarm system be neutralized by a fire company and left in trouble unable to reset, the Incident Commander must notify the Fire Alarm that the system is no longer in service. The Alarm Office should subsequently notify the Alarm monitoring company, service company or homeowner or business owner, to resolve alarm problem that will then follow-up to assure that the system is restored.

#### **E. Contacting a Call-Out Person**

1. After arriving on the scene the Incident Commander should request Fire Alarm to contact a responsible party who will respond to the alarm property. The responsible party will generally be either the owner/manager of the property or the alarm company representative.
2. Companies may reset alarm panels only after troubled zones have been identified and investigated finding no apparent problems.
3. If a responsible party is located, Fire Alarm shall notify the Company Officer at the scene. If notified that the responsible party is en-route, the Company Officer may wait, a reasonable time for their arrival. Or, the Officer may return ones company to in-service status as long as the building can be reasonably secured.

#### **F. Unoccupied Buildings**

1. REMEMBER - AN UNOCCUPIED BUILDING MUST BE LEFT IN A SECURE STATUS. Should the Officer be unable to secure the building, the Officer should ask for a Police Officer to be dispatched and notified of the security issue and that the property needs special attention.

#### **G. SUMMARY**

1. COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS & RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS
  - a. Reasonable time - Enter
  - b. Occupied - Enter
  - c. Unoccupied - Exterior check
2. Check it out.
3. Enter if needed.
4. Return to in-service status if: Return to in-service if:
  - a. Building is secured or a. building is secure, or
  - b. Responsible party is present.
  - c. No apparent fire (bldg. secure)

These guidelines may be changed or altered by the Fire Chief at any time.