Falmouth Fire-EMS Operating Guideline

Response to Automatic Fire Alarms

Objective:
To provide all members of the steps and procedures to take when responding to automatic fire alarms.

General Information:
There are many homes and businesses in the Town of Falmouth with monitored alarm systems. Not all buildings with a monitored alarm system have a Knox Box attached on them to hold keys and emergency contact information. We may arrive at buildings where alarms are sounding and there is no access. In those instances, we need to gain entry to check for a fire, but every precaution should be taken to limit any damage to the building.

Guidelines:
1. The normal response to a residential fire alarm is 2 Engines, Tower, Chief /Duty Officer and on duty Ambulance (if available and in town). For a commercial alarm a 3rd engine is added.

2. The district Engine, Ambulance (if in town) and Chief/Duty Officer will respond code 3 (lights and siren). All others (including Ambulance if coming from out of town) will respond code 1 (no lights and no siren).

3. 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 2nd 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.

4. 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 the 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).

5. 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.

6. 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).

7. A 2nd 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.

8. After checking the location identified by the alarm panel, the investigation group shall take the necessary action.

    a) Notify command of the situation found

    b) If no fire or obvious emergency, ask Command to have alarm panel silenced.

    c) If action is needed, take action (reset pull station, replace detector, etc.)

    d) If no apparent problem, request to Command that the alarm be reset.

9. 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.

10. It is important that the fire alarm not be silenced until crews have determined that there is not an emergency.

11. 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.

12. It is desired that no alarm has been silenced or reset before the Fire-EMS Department has arrived on scene.
    a) If an alarm is silenced or reset 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 silencing or resetting an alarm prior to our arrival. These range from not alerting all occupants to evacuate (if silenced) during a fire to not knowing which detector may have been activated (if reset).

13. If the 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.

14. Once the alarm has been reset 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.

15. If the alarm 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 alarm company to repair the system. A fire watch may be necessary, based on the number of occupants of the building (example: nursing home, senior housing, etc.).

16. 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.