



Online False Alarm Awareness Course

Presented by the Collier County Sheriff's Office and the Alarm Association of Florida Introduction and purpose of this course:

This course offers those who have received a citation for excessive false alarms the opportunity to earn a certificate that can void one citation and penalty.

Completed tests should be submitted to the Collier County Sheriff's Office False Alarm Bureau to be graded. CCSO will mail a certificate to those who pass the test. That certificate and a \$5 administration fee can be mailed to Collier County Code Enforcement in order to void the citation and penalty.

This program provides alarm users information about the procedures used by law enforcement, alarm components and their functions, how false alarms can be prevented, and how to reduce the cost of a false alarm fine.

Part One: Alarm Systems – Your First Line Of Defense

Used properly, an alarm system is one of the most effective ways to deter burglaries. But false alarms are a tremendous drain on resources.

There is just one problem – false alarms.

Nationwide, 96.5 percent of all calls for burglar alarms are false. In Collier County, more than 99 percent of the calls received for responding to an alarm turn out to be false alarms. This consumes precious manpower and resources. More importantly, it can cause complacency and endanger all parties involved – law enforcement, security companies and alarm system owners.

Part Two: Alarm Companies

Alarm companies are required by local and state authorities to be properly licensed. There are three categories for licensing.

1. Burglar Alarm Systems
2. Fire Alarm Systems
3. Burglar and Fire Alarm Systems

Each person servicing or installing an alarm system must be licensed by the State of Florida and carry their identification when performing work. It is prudent to check the license of anyone who will be installing or working on your alarm system before allowing them to begin work. You should also make sure that the alarm company has obtained an occupational license from the county.

Each alarm system should have an owner's manual. It is important to read the manual and familiarize yourself with the system. For example, if you have a problem with a motion detector, the manual will tell you how to bypass that zone so that you can continue to use the system until the motion detector can be serviced.

Part Three: Alarm System Components

Keypad: The keypad is the unit that activates the alarm system. Problems that can occur with keypads include:

- A number sticking when pressed, or not pressed hard enough
- Pushing the wrong number and not clearing the system properly (refer to your owner's manual for proper clearing)
- Use of incorrect keypad codes

Contacts: Contacts are used on entry-exit doors and windows. Prior to setting your alarm system, be sure all doors and windows are locked.

What to watch for in doors:

- Unsecured magnets
- Warping of the top of the door
- Metal doors should have a larger magnet
- An increased gap in the door or window due to settling of the house
- For double doors- make sure the fixed side is pinned on top and bottom
- **SHAKING THE DOOR SHOULD NOT SET OFF THE ALARM.**

What to watch for in windows:

- Unsecured magnets
- Windows need to be closed and locked
- Mini blinds attracted to the magnet
- Unplugged alarm screens

Motion Detectors: Motion detectors are the "inside eyes" of a security alarm system. Motion is detected not by movement, but by the measurement of heat transfer. The movement of an object passing through an area that is under the eye of a detector will register a different temperature than that of the room temperature. This movement causes an alarm. Not only can a person or pet set off an alarm, so can the movement of air from a heat or cooling source, such as an air-conditioning duct, space heater or ceiling fan.

- A motion detector should not be aimed directly toward an air vent or fireplace
- Caution should be used in placing plants in field of view of the motion detector
- Mylar balloons are a common cause of false alarms
- If you have a pet or acquire one, ask your alarm company to install "pet immune" motion detectors
- Spiders and bugs may form webs around the detector or get inside the case, so keep the face of the detector clean
- Movement of vertical blinds can cause false alarms.

Control Panel: The control panel is the "brain" of the system. It monitors the various sensors connected to it, activates the siren and then sends a signal over the phone line. The panel is usually found in a closet which houses the backup battery. A backup battery is a rechargeable battery that powers the system for a minimum of four hours in the event of a power outage. If you have a wireless system, you may have several batteries in the sensors, as well as a backup battery.

Backup Battery: If you have false alarms after a storm, it may not be the storm that caused the alarm. If your batteries are not up to the job, a false alarm may be generated when your alarm system powers up after a power failure. Even a power failure of a second or less may be long enough to cause a false alarm.

Your backup has a useful life of about three to five years, but that life may be shortened if you have had several power outages. An alarm technician should check your backup battery annually, or after any storm-related false alarm.

Glassbreak Detector: This is the "hearing aid" of the system that detects the sound of breaking glass. This type of detector is tuned to the frequency of glass breaking, so the passing of a large vehicle or the rumble of a thunderstorm should not activate the alarm. If you are having problems with the glassbreak detector, contact your alarm company and have them readjust the sensitivity of the system.

Security Screens: Screens on windows and lanais can be wired for detection purposes. Problems generally associated with this type of system are:

- Wiring contacts can corrode from exposure to weather
- Screens can be left ajar and cause a false alarm

Part Four: Why Collier County Enacted An Alarm Ordinance

The 1996 Florida Legislature recognized the problem of false alarms and had enacted several State Statutes to begin focus on solutions.

Effective January 1, 1997

STATE STATUTE: 489.518

Requiring alarm system contractor employees to complete a 12 hour basic training course as well as a background check and fingerprinting.

STATE STATUTE: 489.529

Alarm verification calls, prior to requesting police response, are now required by all residential and commercial intrusion/ burglary alarms that have central monitoring.

STATE STATUTE: 489.530

Limits audible alarms installed by a licensed contractor to 15 minutes.

Permits Are Required For Alarm Installations

The Collier County building code requires a permit before any alarm system is installed. This is for all low-voltage wiring for items such as burglar alarms, fire alarms, sound systems, satellite dishes, etc. Permits are obtained from the Collier County Community Development Division, 2800 N. Horseshoe Dr., Building Review and Permitting Department.

The Purpose Of An Alarm Ordinance:

- ☐ To increase awareness of alarm users regarding their responsibilities
- ☐ To provide alarm system education and training where necessary
- ☐ To decrease the number of false alarms responded to by the Collier County Sheriff's Office

During calendar year 2000, the Collier County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) responded to over 29,000 alarms. Beginning in 2001, the CCSO began to actively enforce the Collier County Ordinance governing alarms, resulting in a significant reduction in alarm responses. In 2014 the CCSO responded to less than 12,000 alarms, for 27,000 registered alarm accounts.

False Alarm Fine Schedule

Pursuant to Collier County False Alarm Ordinance 2014-07, the fine schedule for false alarms occurring within a 180-day period is as follows:

First false alarm response.....	No charge
Second false alarm response.....	No charge
Third and fourth false alarm response.....	\$75 false alarm fine
Fifth and sixth false alarm response.....	\$100 false alarm fine
Seventh and eighth false alarm response.....	\$150 false alarm fine
Ninth and consecutive false alarm response.....	\$200 false alarm fine

Alarm Registration: The purpose of registration is to determine how many alarm systems are used in Collier County and to ensure proper information on each alarm site such as mailing address, key holder information, alarm company, etc.

- ☐ Per Collier County Alarm Ordinance 2014-07, it is the sole responsibility of each alarm company to register all newly installed security alarm systems and to renew existing security alarm system registrations before the then-effective registration expires.
- ☐ Each registration form is valid for two (2) years after its date of issuance.

□ It is important for the alarm user to notify and keep information current with their alarm company, including phone numbers, alternate or seasonal mailing address and key holder information, etc., so in turn, the alarm company is providing accurate information to the Sheriff's Office on the registration of their security alarm system.

NOTE: A key holder is an alternate contact person and is someone local who does not live at the alarm site, such as a friend, neighbor, relative, home watch service, property manager, etc. and could respond to the alarm as requested per the alarm company or law enforcement, should the alarm user(s)/owner(s) be unavailable. A spouse is not considered a key holder.

□ Per the alarm ordinance, an alarm company may charge a fee to their customers to cover the administrative costs of registration. The cost shall not exceed ten dollars (\$10.00) for registration or registration renewal.

For more information on the false alarm ordinance, go to www.Municode.com and search under Collier County.

Part Five: The Sheriff's Office False Alarm Unit

The Sheriff's Office is tasked with enforcing state statutes, laws and county ordinances. The administration and enforcement of the Collier County False Alarm Ordinance is assigned to the Collier County Sheriff's Office Alarm Unit. There are two deputies assigned to the False Alarm Unit. Daily functions of the unit include compiling and recording false alarm information gathered from the computer aided dispatch (CAD), which records all alarms in the Sheriff's Office jurisdiction. This information is then entered into a software program which keeps track of individual accounts and tells the unit if the alarm system is registered or if there is a fine to be imposed. A False Alarm Account History is provided to each alarm user upon their first false alarm and when a citation is issued. The alarm user should check with their alarm company if they have a false alarm and do not know the reason for the activation.

Part Six: Preventing False Alarms:

False Alarm Prevention Suggestions:

Power to the panel: Is the alarm panel transformer plugged into a 24-hour outlet? The alarm system must have AC power. NEVER unplug the transformer; you may forget to plug it back in. If your power must be off for more than 10 hours, please call your alarm company. What shape is the battery in? The battery's life depends on how often power outages occur and how many accessories the system is driving (i.e., keypads, motion detectors, smoke detectors, etc.) Most panels will send a low battery signal to the central station when the battery's voltage lowers to a certain level.

Low batteries are the most common equipment reason for false alarm activations.

Door and window contacts: Be sure the doors and windows are closed and locked. If an unlocked door is opened by a person, wind, dog, etc., the alarm is activated and the police respond. This is considered a false alarm.

What to watch for in doors:

- Unsecured magnets
- Warping at the top of the door
- A metal or metal sheathed door should have a larger or stronger magnet
- Closed but not latched and locked doors (especially your-delay doors)
- An increased gap between door and jamb due to settling of the house. For double doors make sure the fixed side is pinned on top and bottom.

What to watch for in windows:

- Unsecured magnets
- Windows should be completely closed and locked – it may show a good circuit at the time of arming, but a misaligned magnet and contact may fail with a change in temperature or humidity.
- Casement windows that are cranked closed against the closed latch with the latch not securing the window.
- Mini blinds attracted to the magnet

- Unplugged alarm screens

Motion detectors:

- A motion detector should not be aimed directly toward an air vent or fireplace.
- Caution should be used in placing plants in field of view of motion detector.
- Mylar balloons are a common cause of false alarms.
- If pets are on your premises while the interior motion(s) is/are on, be sure the detector and lens are designed to provide a pet alley. If you acquire a pet, please contact your alarm company.
- Spiders or bugs may form webs around the detector or may actually get inside the case. Keep the face of the detector clean.
- Drafts in the walls can cause false alarms if the motion detector is flush mount.
- Movement of vertical blinds can cause false alarms.
- Holiday decorations cause false alarms.
- Motion detectors need a clear view - do not block them. Do not stack things around the line of view, as they may fall over.
- Ceiling fans cause air movement - this can cause false alarms.
- Alarm system maintenance inspection monthly or more frequently.
- Check door and window latches as well as locks.
- If alarm screens are part of the alarm system, clips or other fasteners should be inspected.
- Contact switches and magnets on doors and windows should be clean and tight. Window cleaning can loosen or dislodge magnets.
- The area around smoke detectors, motion sensors or other interior devices should be inspected for dust, spider webs and insects. Interior cleaning of these devices must be done by your alarm company.
- Visually inspect any exposed wire for damage. Repairs for wiring should be done by your alarm company. Test the alarm system with your central station as recommended in the alarm system owner's manual. Always call your central station **BEFORE** starting a test and again **AFTER** the test is complete. Your alarm system should always be tested after any telephone work is completed. Incorrect wiring can prevent the system from communicating with the central station under certain circumstances. The alarm system will seize your telephone line during communication with the central station. This is normal. The alarm system is sending the central station the information regarding the activity on your alarm system. This will only last five to 30 seconds. Advise your alarm company of any telephone number changes at home or work. Telephone numbers for your key holders should be checked for any changes.

Annually:

- System sensors equipped with 9-volt batteries require replacement of the batteries annually. Replacement batteries should be the exact standard part that is recommended by the manufacturer. For example, if alkaline batteries are specified, do not use lithium. If in doubt, call your alarm company.
- The backup battery in the system control panel should be inspected. Normally, backup batteries will last five years. However, in Southwest Florida the life is usually two to three years. This is due to our extreme summer heat and frequent power fluctuations due to electrical storms. If your battery appears to be leaking, call your alarm company to arrange for the proper replacement.
- When the alarm system is more than 10 years old, it may be time to consider an upgrade or replacement. An alarm system is like a car, it will not last forever.
- When your alarm system has generated a false alarm, call your alarm company for troubleshooting ideas.
- Consider having your alarm company inspect and test the system annually. Preventative maintenance can save false alarms, trouble and expensive repairs when done by a trained technician.
- Verify the cancellation procedures with the central station.

It's Time For A Vacation!

You've been counting the days until it is time to leave. You are certain that you haven't forgotten anything you need to do to ensure your home is secure and running smoothly while you are gone.

Vacation Checklist:

- House- and pet-sitters hired.
- Arrange for mail and newspapers to be picked up daily.
- Lawn service to care for the yard.
- Timers set on interior lighting.

What about your security system?

Most security alarm users don't give a second thought about the alarm system. They automatically arm it as they leave and never stop to consider that it could cause numerous false alarms while they are gone because they failed to take a few minutes to update vital information and train all temporary users.

Security System Checklist:

- Train each person who will enter the premises on how to use the system (including bypassing the motion detector, what to do if an alarm occurs and how to cancel an alarm)
- Give each person who will enter the alarm site their own disarm code for the keypad and a passcode or ID to give the monitoring center if an alarm occurs.
- Call your alarm company and tell them what days you will be gone.
- Tell them whether or not anyone is authorized to be in your home while you are away.
- Update your emergency contact information, including who has keys to your home.
- Give them a number to reach you at if you want to be notified of any alarms while you are away.

Taking the time to go through a Security System Checklist will:

- Ensure that temporary alarm users know how to properly use the system
- Give the most current contact information and status of the premises to your alarm company
- And most importantly, help avoid false alarms and the possible imposition of fees or fines

If You Give Them A Key – Give Them The Codes!

How many times have the police been dispatched to your home because visitors, family, childcare-givers, domestic help, real estate agents, contractors, or other employees have set off your alarm and did not know what to do?

Consider the following steps to help reduce the chance that you will have a false alarm:

1. Make sure everyone who has access to your home, such as childcare-givers, domestic help and extended family are familiar with your alarm system.
 - Teach them how to arm the system and make sure they know how much time they have to exit if they are leaving.
 - If entering the home, ensure they know how to disarm the system and how much time they have to do it before the system alerts your monitoring center.
2. Contact your alarm company and assign each person their own personal passcode-password. You can have it removed when it's no longer needed.
3. Educate your guests/employees on your alarm monitoring company's procedures should they set off the alarm accidentally.
4. Teach them how to cancel a false alarm to avoid potential fees or fines.
5. Keep your monitoring center's phone number in an easy to find place.
6. If you're going out of town and have a house sitter, make sure they have permission to authorize repairs to your system if it fails.
7. Make sure everyone who has access to your home or business has a valid code to turn your alarm system on and off, as well as the code or password used to identify themselves to your alarm company as a valid alarm user.

Animals and False Alarms:

Many times each day, law enforcement dispatches an officer to an alarm triggered by a family pet moving throughout the home. Rodents, spiders and even geckos climbing on the sensor can also trigger motion detectors. There are steps you can take to avoid false alarms created by animals.

1. Talk to your alarm company about installing pet-friendly devices or changing your system design to accommodate pets.
2. Check with your alarm company to determine if cross zoning is an option. Under this option your monitoring center would not dispatch on motion alarms unless they also receive an entry alarm. For example, a motion alarm received with a door or window alarm.
3. Another option is to try second call verification. Provide your monitoring center with an off-site number where you can be reached before dispatching the police. You can decide if the police need to be dispatched based on the signals the alarm company

received. Contact your alarm company; they'll be more than happy to work with you to provide a solution to reduce your risk of false alarms.

Weather-Related False Alarms

Thunderstorms, lightning and power outages do not equal false alarms.

Consider the following:

- Power surges and lightning strikes should not cause false alarms.
- False alarms caused by lightning strikes are controllable through the proper grounding of alarm systems and the use of power surge suppressors.
- Use of surge suppressors greatly reduces false alarms by redirecting and dissipating electrical current to the ground.
- Power outages or interruption of power should not cause false alarms.

In order to avoid costly false alarms that may occur during inclement weather, contact your alarm dealer and follow these simple steps:

- Repair loose-fitting doors and windows.
- Ensure that all alarm contacts are firmly in place.
- Use wide-gap door and window contacts.
- Use surge protectors/suppressors on both the alarm system and the phone line sending the alarm signal to the monitoring center.
- Ensure that the battery backup protection is in good working order, is fully charged and will hold that charge for a minimum of four hours.
- Ensure that your alarm system is properly grounded. Remember: Properly designed, installed and maintained alarm systems will not generate false alarm activity (and fines) due to power surges or power interruptions.

Part Seven: Enhanced Call Verification For The Consumer

Within the burglar alarm industry there is a movement to migrate alarm customers to a process that is called Enhanced Call Verification or ECV. This overview was developed to provide alarm owners information on ECV and how they can take advantage of this program that will significantly reduce law enforcement dispatches to invalid alarms and ultimately enhance the effectiveness of your alarm system.

The History:

More than a decade ago the industry, in conjunction with law enforcement, developed a process of verification by which the alarm company calls the premises and asks for a pass code prior to requesting a dispatch from law enforcement. This procedure has been effective in eliminating more than 75 percent of the potential dispatches to invalid alarm activations. The challenge now is to implement a program that will further reduce dispatches to these invalid alarms.

Why Enhanced Call Verification?

There has been a large increase in the number of properties, both residential and non-residential, that have installed burglar alarm systems to provide safety and security to people and property. Along with this increase in the alarm population there has been a proportionate increase in the number of occasions that the alarm industry is requesting a dispatch to what subsequently turn out to be invalid alarms. Studies have shown that the vast majority of these are caused by user error.

Enhanced Call Verification:

At the request of law enforcement, the industry began a series of tests with the verification process. These tests involved calling additional contact numbers prior to making the dispatch request. This process produced reductions between 30 percent and 50 percent in dispatch requests. ECV has the potential of delivering significant and immediate reductions in dispatches to alarm activations. As an alarm owner, ECV provides you an additional level of contact when your alarm is activated and increased confidence that police will be dispatched to a valid alarm.

The Process:

Enhanced Call Verification procedures are used only for burglary signals. Panic, holdup and other user initiated alarms, as well as fire, will still be handled per the procedure that you currently have in place with your alarm company. When your company initiates ECV, they will be calling two phone numbers prior to dispatching the alarm call. On average this will delay the dispatch by less than 30 seconds. When available, the second number called should be a cellular number since most of the false dispatches occur while

turning the system either on or off. It is not the intention of this procedure to have you guess as to whether to dispatch the police when you are not at the premises. Since these alarms are occurring during the on/off process, it makes sense that someone is either at the premises or has recently left. In this case you will have sufficient information to make a decision as whether or not to request law enforcement to be dispatched. If you are not at the premise, or have not recently left, or do not have additional information, then the decision should always be for the alarm company to dispatch.

Good Citizenship:

Implementing ECV serves the community by conserving resources and is part of being a responsible operator of your alarm system. If there is a need for more training you should contact your alarm company and request additional instruction. If there is an ongoing problem with the equipment that is causing dispatches to invalid alarms, then the system should be serviced to eliminate the problem. Most problems can be minimized by insuring that you've been given adequate time to arm the alarm and safely exit or enter and turn the alarm off. The industry standards recommend that you have at least 60 seconds to exit and 45 seconds to enter. You can verify your system's programming by contacting your alarm company. Together we can address this issue of invalid alarm dispatches and lessen the burden on our already overtaxed law enforcement.

Part Eight: Consumer Protection And The Alarm User After You Buy

Now that you have purchased an alarm system, what can you do if you have a problem with false alarms, your alarm system or your alarm company? Don't despair, there are tried and true methods you can employ, which can help you resolve the issues at hand.

Problems with False Alarms

- Most false alarms are classified as user error, whether due to unfamiliarity with the alarm system, lack of adequate training, or outside influences such as neighbors, cleaning staff, delivery personnel or construction workers.
- In order to avoid potential costly fees/fines for false alarms, be absolutely sure that every person who has keys to your alarm site knows how to properly operate the system, knows how to cancel a false alarm call and has their own pass code.
- Training, training, training! If you are not completely comfortable with the operation of your alarm system, contact your alarm company and request additional training for you and every other person who has keys to your facility.
- Since the installation of your alarm system, have you acquired a new pet, remodeled, moved furniture or changed your physical environment in any way? If so, you must contact your alarm company, as the system may not have been designed to accommodate your new surroundings.

Problems With Alarm System

- Always contact your alarm company first.
- It is important to know what your warranty rights are, so read your contract carefully to avoid any misunderstandings or unexpected costs.
- Give your alarm company an opportunity to correct the problem and make yourself available for service calls and/or retraining meetings.
- If you run into difficulty in getting your system serviced, put your concerns in writing, giving enough detail so that your alarm company can easily discern the steps they need to take to assist you. Send a technician, retrain on the proper operation of the system or clarify issues.
- If all else falls, contact your local Consumer Protection Office or State Attorney General's Office for assistance.

Problems with Alarm Company

- Once again, try to work out your differences directly with your alarm company. They want a happy customer and you want to be a satisfied consumer.
- Deal with facts, not emotions, The more concise you can be with the nature of your problem, the easier it will be for your alarm company to satisfy you.
- Don't be afraid to go directly to the top. If you are not satisfied with your salesperson, technician or customer service representative, ask to speak with a manager, owner or president. Consider purchasing a maintenance contract so that your alarm system can be serviced annually to keep it in tip-top shape. You would not go five years without performing regular maintenance on your automobile - things like changing the oil, turning the rotors and checking and replacing belts and hoses and expect that you will have no problems. Alarm systems are no different and also require regular maintenance – checking the battery, cleaning motion sensors, replacing door and/or window contacts, and testing the overall operation of the equipment. Regular maintenance of your alarm system will help alleviate costly false alarms and can extend the life of your alarm system