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GENERAL NEWS

False alarm ordinance watch**Lee County, Fla.**

The number of security alarm calls in Lee County has declined 28 percent this year, which officials attribute to a new false alarm ordinance, reported The News-Press.

Between 2000 and 2002, deputies responded to more than 35,000 alarm calls per year - 99 percent turned out to be false. This response cost taxpayers more than \$1.5 million annually.

Lee County commissioners approved the ordinance in March 2003, but it was not enforced until the fall of the same year. The ordinance, which went into effect in July, fines alarm owners for false calls. Penalties range from no fine for the first dispatch to \$400 for the tenth dispatch - after which the offender's license can be revoked. There is also a \$25 annual registration fee required.

Last year, deputies responded to 5,794 fewer alarms than in 2002 - a 16 percent drop. Officials say they have seen an even greater decrease this year. Calls are down 28 percent in the first three months of the year compared to the same 2003 period.

Walnut Creek, Calif.

Tired of responding to false alarms, Walnut Creek police are tightening the city's security alarm policies.

Starting Sept. 1, residents and businesses must obtain alarm permits, which are free to residents but will cost businesses \$25 per year. In addition, all alarm owners will be fined for excessive false alarms and can have their licenses revoked.

The police department responded to 3,500 false alarms last year, at a cost of more than \$100,000, reported the Contra Costa Times. The city council voted to unanimously amend its alarm ordinance in May, mandating the permits and fines.

During a 12-month period, the first two false alarms will receive warning letters. Then, fines begin, with \$25 for the third alarm, \$50 for the fourth, \$75 for the fifth and \$100 for each alarm after that.

Police may suspend the license and refuse to respond to alarms after the fifth false alarm. The ordinance establishes an appeal process for alarm owners who wish to reinstate their license.

Williamstown, Mass.

An alarm system bylaw has been passed here - requiring business, residents and alarm installation companies with active systems to obtain an alarm permit, according to the North Adams Transcript.

The fee for the permit will run between \$25 and \$50. In addition, a \$5 to \$10 yearly fee will be charged. The bylaw also sets a multi-tiered fine schedule of up to \$300, but fines do not come into effect until a third occurrence. Frequent

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abusers may have their permits revoked.

The law was approved in May at the town's annual meeting.

The ordinance includes a section that states police do not have to respond to owners whose alarms are repeatedly false, but Town Manager Peter Fohlin told the Transcript that would occur in rare cases only.

Last year, the Williamstown Police Department responded to 299 alarm calls, with 297 being false.

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