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GENERAL NEWS

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

A new security alarm ordinance is now in effect in Hillsborough County that reduces the number of false alarm residents or businesses can have within a year.

The rule was developed through a collaboration between the Hillsborough County Commission, the sheriff's office and the alarm industry, reported the Tampa Bay Business Journal. The goal is to reduce the amount of nonproductive time deputies' log when having to respond to false alarms.

Under the ordinance, security systems users will be fined for false alarms that officials respond to over a one-year period.

The first and second occurrence within a year receives a warning, while the third event nets a \$75 fine. A fourth false alarm equals \$100, a fifth is a \$150 fine and a sixth nets a \$300 fine. Any offense that numbers seven or above is \$500. In addition, a \$100 fine will be charged to an alarm user who fails to maintain or provide required information to an officer conducting an alarm investigation.

North Naples, Fla.

False fire alarms are costing taxpayers in the North Naples Fire Control and Rescue District roughly \$250,000 a year, plus the wasted effort of the firefighters sent to calls, officials said.

The ordinance makes property owners who have faulty equipment pay fines of up to \$500 for each false alarm, reported The News-Press.

The law, voted into effect in September by the district's fire commission, is designed to reduce the number of false alarms that fire crews respond to each year.

Each false dispatch- there can be almost 500 a year- requires two fire trucks, a ladder truck and 10 firefighters, including a battalion chief, to be dispatched. Approximately 91 percent of all fire alarms in businesses, multifamily unit complexes and some single-family homes each year are false.

Property owners will be allowed one free false alarm within a half-year period. A second false alarm within the six-month period will result in a \$100 fine. A third false alarm will cost \$250. A fourth false alarm on up will cost \$500 a piece.

Oceanside, Calif.

The Oceanside City Council approved a new code in September that police officials hope will end the drain that false alarms cause on police resources, according to the North County Times.

The code will now charge owners of security systems after a second false alarm dispatch instead of after the third false alarm. Residents will begin paying a \$50 fee after the second false alarm under the new code, but the exact amount of additional fees will need to be determined at a public hearing.

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The change is expected to generate \$195,000 a year for the city's general fund, up from the \$110,000 the current ordinance nets.

There are an estimated 8,000 security alarms in Oceanside. In 2003, there were 5,941 burglary and robbery alarm calls and of those 99 percent were false. And those false dispatches added up to approximately 2,200 hours of lost productivity for the police force in 2003.

Vacaville, Calif.

Police officers here responded to an estimated 6,000 burglar alarms last year and 99 percent of those turned out to be false, reported the Daily Republic.

Acting Police Chief Wade Engelson is proposing the city become more strict on the issue by requiring a \$40 annual registration fee for alarm owners.

The money collected from the fees would allow the department to build a database containing information on each alarm operating in the city as well as a list of people to contact should an alarm go off.

The cash would also let the department establish a public education program to raise awareness of the false alarm problem, as well as offset the cost incurred by police when responding to alarms.

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