

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS . 11465 WEST CIVIC CENTER DRIVE . AVONDALE, AZ 85323

WORK SESSION
February 2, 2009
6:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER BY MAYOR ROGERS

1 ROLL CALL BY THE CITY CLERK

2 ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES IN THE POLICE DEPARTMENT IN ORDER TO IMPROVE OVERALL OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Staff will discuss two proposed administrative changes in the police department in order to improve overall operational efficiency. First, staff will discuss amending the existing Avondale City Code relating to Alarm Systems (Chapter 20-30), eliminating non-verified responses to alarm activations by police officers within our City. Second, staff will discuss a proposed modification of the existing photo enforcement program based on a review of the program.

3 LANDSCAPE ORDINANCE TEXT AMENDMENT PROPOSAL

City Council will receive an update on proposed amendments to the Landscape Ordinance. For information, discussion and direction.

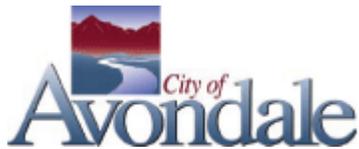
4 ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carmen Martinez".

Carmen Martinez
City Clerk

Individuals with special accessibility needs, including sight or hearing impaired, large print, or interpreter, should contact the City Clerk at 623-333-1200 or TDD 623-333-0010 at least two business days prior to the Council Meeting.



CITY COUNCIL REPORT

SUBJECT:

Administrative Changes in the Police Department in
Order to Improve Overall Operational Efficiency

MEETING DATE:

February 2, 2009

TO: Mayor and Council
FROM: Kevin Kotsur, Chief of Police (623) 333-7201
THROUGH: Charlie McClendon, City Manager

PURPOSE:

Staff is proposing two administrative changes in the police department in order to improve overall operational efficiency. First staff recommends amending the existing Avondale City Code relating to Alarm Systems (Chapter 20-30), eliminating non-verified responses to alarm activations by police officers within our City. It is recommended this ordinance be replaced with a "verified alarm response program" where police officers only respond to alarm activations upon discovery of a criminal event. Police will still respond to robbery and panic alarms. Second is the modification of the existing photo enforcement program based on a review of the program.

BACKGROUND:**Item #1 - Verified Alarm Response**

On October 17, 2005, Staff brought forth to City Council a request to revise the then current Avondale City Ordinance pertaining to false alarms, which lacked a clear structure that would give the City the ability to hold alarm businesses accountable for improper installation of alarms and alarm owners for improperly using their alarm system, and stipulating the consequences of not paying an assessment fee. It was hoped that the recommended changes would provide for enhanced regulations, hold individuals accountable who install and/or purchase alarm systems, encourage improved reliability of the alarm systems and services, and develop a process within the Finance Department for collecting assessment fees for false alarms.

On November 14, 2005, direction was provided by City Council to incorporate the revisions and false alarm fee schedule.

During 2006, the City of Avondale and the Police Department marketed and educated citizens and alarm companies on the newly revised City Ordinance pertaining to alarm systems. A grace period was established to allow businesses and residents the time to properly register their alarm systems with the Police Department and to adequately address any concerns or issues with the revised Ordinance.

Beginning in January of 2007, the Records Bureau of the Police Department took on the full responsibility of maintaining and supporting the City Ordinance pertaining to false alarms. This included the daily review of calls for service designated as false alarms, the mailing of all warning letters and notices pertaining to assessment fees, the review and disposition of all appeal letters, accepting and processing assessment fees received, maintaining a workflow program that identifies where every false alarm case is located within the process system, and answering questions and addressing concerns related to the Ordinance. This was accomplished in addition to the other regular duties and functions of the Records Bureau.

Item # 2 - Photo Speed Enforcement

On February 20, 2007, Mayor and Council approved the recommendation to deploy a photo speed enforcement van at different locations throughout the City of Avondale for the purpose of:

- Reducing the number of traffic collisions
- Responding to citizen complaints of speeding vehicles
- Increasing driver awareness of their speed, thus improving traffic safety

ATS was selected as the contract vendor for the City and a six-month trial period commenced on June 1, 2007. As part of the trial period, the Police Department stated that it would present a report to the Council at the end of the first six months, and provide recommendations regarding whether or not to continue the program. Due to difficulty in reconciling revenue and expenditures, administrative issues with the vendor and operational problems, the evaluation period was extended to get a more accurate assessment of the effectiveness of the program.

DISCUSSION:

Item #1 Verified Alarm Response

For nearly the past two years, the Records Bureau and our Crime Analyst have tracked these calls including the "cost of doing business" compared to what has been received in assessment fees.

After reviewing a total of 7,901 alarm calls for service (robbery, panic and burglary) between January of 2007 through November of 2008 and the total time (in hours and minutes) and total salary including benefits of the affected areas in the Police Department, the following was determined.

PD Response to All Alarm Calls

Total Time/Total Cost

January 2007 – November 2008

	Communications	Patrol	Records	Final Total
Hours/Minutes	229:19	2247:09	2624:24	5100:52
Salary/Benefits	\$7,425	\$84,943	\$76,370	\$168,738

During this same period of time, the Records Bureau accepted 1,422 alarm registration forms, sent out 3,033 warning/violation notices for false alarm activations and received \$55,850 in assessment fees. \$20,300 in assessment fees were dismissed after their appeal was approved, to include a total fine of over \$8,000 that was expunged. \$81,900 in assessment fees have been turned over to the City Finance Department/Collections. If all fees were collected, a total of \$158,050 would have been received, still leaving over \$10,000 of cost absorbed by the Police Department in salaries/benefits.

Burglary Alarms

Between January of 2007 through November of 2008, the Avondale Police Department responded to 7,104 burglary alarms. A minimum of two patrol officers are assigned to each of these calls. 98% (6,962 calls) were false burglary alarms. 150 police reports were taken and a total of seven arrests were made/eventually made.

Panic Alarms

Between January of 2007 through November of 2008, the Avondale Police Department responded to 621 panic alarms. A minimum of two patrol officers are assigned to each of these calls. 99% (615 calls) were false panic alarms. There were four police reports taken and a total of three arrests were

made/eventually made.

Robbery Alarms

Between January of 2007 through November of 2008, the Avondale Police Department responded to 176 robbery alarms. A minimum of one supervisor and two patrol officers are assigned to each of these calls. 100% of the calls were false robbery alarms, equating to zero police reports written and zero arrests.

Lakewood Police Department – Lakewood, Colorado

As we continue to review the effectiveness and efficiency of our Police Department, it is clear that we need to review how we as a Police Department respond to alarm system activations given that, on average, 99% of them are false. Further, it is also critical to review response times to alarm calls for service, minimum number of officers/supervisors required at each alarm call, and the ability to maintain having police personnel available to handle higher priority calls. We are also seeking alternative ways to increase the time available for Police Officers to conduct proactive patrols in their assigned beat.

A review of other police agencies was conducted to determine if other agencies have addressed alarm calls in a more efficient manner. The Lakewood (Colorado) Police Department implemented the Verified Alarm Response program. In Lakewood, they were averaging over 6,000 burglary alarm calls for service each year, with 98% consistently being false alarms. They, too, had a city ordinance mandating a billing system with sliding fees for successive false alarms, costing nearly \$250,000 per year to administer, yet generating less than \$100,000 per year in revenue. More important, the ordinance had no affect on the false alarm rate.

Beginning in late 2001, the City of Lakewood began examining the success of programs known as Verified Alarm Response. In 2003, representatives from ten Denver metropolitan area agencies began meeting to develop a proposed model alarm response policy and that same year, the Metropolitan Association of Chiefs of Police approved the policy for adoption.

Salt Lake City Police Department – Salt Lake City, Utah

In 1999 in Salt Lake City, the police department responded to 8,213 alarm activations. Only 23 calls (0.3%) justified a police report of any sort, only a few of which were for actual burglaries. Nearly \$500,000 of the police department's budget was attributable to false alarms. Only \$150,000 in alarm fees was collected. In 2000, the City Council approved a Verified Alarm Response Ordinance.

Within the first nine months of the Verified Alarm Response being in effect, the Salt Lake City Police Department experienced a 90% decrease in alarm-related calls for service. This represented 6,338 fewer calls for service or the equivalent of five full-time police officers. The passage of this ordinance in 2000, made no significant impact on the total number of actual burglaries.

Benefits to Alarm Owners and the Alarm Industry

In the assessment conducted by the Salt Lake City Police Department, they also described numerous benefits of the Verified Alarm Response received by the alarm owners and the alarm industry.

Alarm Owners experienced a 6 to 15 minute alarm activation response time from private guard companies, far lower than what the police responders were able to provide; lower average costs from the monthly fee paid to the private guard company than what they were paying in fines for false alarms; and continued police response to robbery and panic alarms.

The Alarm Industry now provides their customers with a valued quick response to alarm activations; have increased their revenue from the additional monthly fees charged to customers; and they can redirect their time and effort to serving their customers.

Verified Alarm Response

A Verified Alarm Response places the responsibility for alarm verification with the companies that market, sell and install those alarms. It also allows our Police Department the ability to utilize discretion, common sense and experience to evaluate the need to respond to various alarm types as they see fit.

Police would only respond to a burglary alarm under one of the following conditions:

- Multiple alarm trips, or alarm trips of varying origins, indicating entry into the premises.
- Verification by the on-scene response of the alarm company of a crime or suspicious circumstance.
- Cameras or audio devices, monitored by an alarm company, that indicate a crime may have occurred or is occurring.
- Witness reports of glass breakage, suspicious activity or other information that corroborates the alarm.
- Any other events or circumstances that indicate the alarm may be valid.

Action Items:

- Discontinue having a Police response to burglary alarm calls for service unless the call for service meets one of the conditions as listed above under Verified Alarm Response.
- Amend the current City Ordinance on Alarm Systems to reflect a Verified Alarm Response.
- Develop a public education campaign to fully explain to citizens the rationale for this change in response. It is important that we assure citizens that although we are handling burglary alarms in a different manner, this response method will allow us to spend greater time handling higher priority calls for service and will increase the time that patrol officers are available to conduct proactive patrols.

Item #2 - Photo Speed Enforcement Program

The photo speed enforcement program is being evaluated based on the number of motor vehicle collisions and the number of speed violations reported between June 1, 2007 and June 1, 2008.

Beginning in May 2007 ATS began issuing warnings for speeding violations. At the end of this 30-day warning period, a total of 314 warning citations were issued to vehicles traveling at least 10 miles over the speed limit. Citations were issued to violators beginning on June 1, 2007.

The photo enforcement speed van averaged approximately 630 events per month during the review period. An event means a photo was taken of an alleged speeding vehicle which is reviewed to confirm the driver was speeding. From the 630 "events" issued by the photo speed van per month an average of 335 citations per month were determined to be actual speeding violations resulting in the issuance of a traffic citation for a total of 4022 citations during the trial period.

Court Disposition

3417 of the 4022 photo speed citations issued during the trial period have been processed through the Avondale City Court system. The following chart identifies the disposition of these citations:

Total Photo Speed Cases filed 6-1-07 to 6-1-08	100%	3,417
Plea of responsible	10%	337
Defensive Driving School	37%	1,280
Dismissals by Judge	25%	865
Dismissal by Officers	13%	431
Dismissal by Prosecutor	1%	68
Pending – Matter scheduled for civil traffic arraignment	.05%	12
Defendant fails to appear for a civil traffic appearance or hearing	1%	43
Hearings	1%	72
Hearings Held	1%	18
Other (mail in payments and suspensions paid, plea of no contest)	10%	381
Paid in Full		1,863

Radar Van Deployment

Locations for the deployment of the radar van were determined by the following factors: traffic accident rate, input from Avondale Police Traffic Officers, and citizen complaints. The photo speed van was deployed at more than 30 high visibility locations throughout the City to deter speeding vehicles and to modify driver behavior. The hours of deployment for the photo speed van were 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM Monday through Friday.

During the trial period, 85% of the deployment sites were a combination of arterial streets and complaint areas with traffic volume of 10,000 vehicles per day. The photo enforcement van was deployed in school zones for the remaining 15% of the enforcement time.

Review of Violation Types

During this trial period, 4022 speeding citations were issued. Citations are issued when drivers exceed the posted speed limit by 11 mph on arterial streets and 4 mph in school zones.

- The highest number of citations (1860) were issued in the area of Friendship Park near 119th Lane and McDowell Road
- The second highest number of citations issued (478) were at 107th Ave and Earl Drive.
- The highest numbers of school zone citations issued were at the school zone on Central Avenue at La Pasada Blvd. Of the 316 school zone speeding citations issued 144 were issued at this location.

Review of accidents in the area of photo radar van deployment sites

Staff reviewed the number of accidents near the photo radar deployment sites, comparing the trial period in 2007 and 2008 to the same period in 2006. This was done to determine whether photo radar had an impact on the accident rate adjacent to photo speed deployment locations.

- There was an increase in accidents at 107th and Pierce from 6 in 2006 to 12 in 2007 and 11 in 2008.
- There was a 63% decrease in the number of traffic accidents on McDowell near Friendship Park from 2006 to 2007. There were 8 accidents in 2006 compared to 3 accidents in 2007 in the same time period. There were 4 accidents in 2008 during the same time period.

- The number of traffic accidents within a ½ mile radius of 107th Ave and Indian School increased from 7 to 16 when comparing accidents from 2006 to 2007. Accidents decreased to 11 in 2008 in this area.

Note – the number of accidents reviewed in these comparisons are statistically insignificant. There is insufficient data to determine the impact of photo radar in relation to traffic accidents.

Accident Rates

Accident rates near photo enforcement sites increased from 2006-2007 and then slightly decreased from 2007-2008. The overall city accident rate decreased slightly from 2007-2008 as listed below:

Location	2006 Jan - May	2006 Jan - May	2006 Jan - May	Change 2006- 2007	Change 2007- 2008	Change 2006- 2008
1/4 Mile Along Roadway, Red-light Enforcement	87	97	91	11.49%	-6.19%	4.60%
1/2 Mile Along Roadway, Red-light Enforcement	116	125	120	7.76%	-4.00%	3.45%
1/4 Mile Along Roadway, Speed Enforcement	71	87	86	22.54%	-1.15%	21.13%
1/2 Mile Along Roadway, Speed Enforcement	143	166	146	16.08%	-12.05%	2.10%
1/4 Mile Along Roadway, Any Photo Enforcement	158	184	177	16.46%	-3.80%	12.03%
1/2 Mile Along Roadway, Any Photo Enforcement	259	291	266	12.36%	-8.59%	2.70%
All accidents in City of Avondale	489	538	486	10.02%	-9.67%	-0.61%

Note – the number of accidents reviewed in these comparisons are statistically insignificant. There is insufficient data to determine the impact of photo radar in relation to traffic accidents.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Although there is insufficient data to determine if photo speed enforcement has a direct impact on the traffic accident rate as part of this review the presence of a photo speed enforcement van does modify driver behavior. Further, when comparing the number of citations issued by the photo speed van to the number of citations issued by all Avondale Police Officers, the photo speed van produces more workload. The photo speed van issued 4022 speeding citations compared to 1553 issued by all Avondale Police Officers during this one year trial period. The speed van issues approximately 21 citations a day during a daily deployment of 5-7 hours where it is deployed between three and five locations. It is estimated that it would take 2 full-time Avondale Police Officers to write the same number of citations as currently written by the current photo enforcement deployment locations in Avondale. This is assuming these two Officers did nothing but write traffic citations.

Further Analysis

- Program reconciliation - In order to analyze the reconciliation of photo enforcement citations the Finance and Budget Office conducted an analysis of photo enforcement citations issued to determine overall cost effectiveness. Data was reviewed for a five month period between July and November, 2008. By working with the Court Administrator it was estimated that the photo enforcement program is not providing full cost recovery. The estimated cost of administering the program is \$471,630 while the revenue generated from the program is \$426,340. It is estimated the cost to the City to administer photo radar, to include speed and red-light enforcement, is \$45,020. Further, the Finance and Budget Office will continue to work with the Court Administrator and the Police Department to determine photo enforcement citation reconciliation.
- Review of photo red-light intersections – Currently the Avondale photo enforcement program includes two photo red-light intersections located at Dysart Road and Van Buren Street and Dysart Road and McDowell Road. A review of the accident rate and the citations issued from

these locations indicates the following:

- There is limited impact on the number of traffic accidents occurring at these red-light intersections.
- During the past year 5366 photo red-light citations were issued at these two intersections. 71% of these citations (3810) were issued for failing to stop when making a right turn against a red-light. There are no known accidents occurring at these intersections as a result of these violations.

OPTIONS

- Option 1 – Maintain current photo speed enforcement program with one photo speed van
- Option 2 – Discontinue photo speed enforcement
- Option 3 – Expand the photo speed enforcement program

BUDGETARY IMPACT:

Item #2 Photo Speed Enforcement

The current estimate is that the net cost to operate photo enforcement is \$45,020 with the deployment of one speed enforcement vehicle and two red-light intersections. This cost is currently absorbed with existing funding in the Court and Police Department. By adding one fixed photo speed enforcement location, discontinuing right turn on red-light enforcement and adding photo speed enforcement to the two existing intersections, photo enforcement reconciliation may change. There will be an increase in direct costs to implement these recommendations to the City that should be offset by an increase in fine revenue. The overall costs of administering photo enforcement will continue to be monitored by the Budget and Finance Office to ensure the program remains cost effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION:

Item #1 - Verified Alarm Response

Staff recommends a change to our City Ordinance on Alarm Systems - discontinuing our current false alarm program and replacing it with the Verified Alarm Response program. A Verified Alarm Response Program will allow us to use our existing resources (patrol officers, dispatchers, record clerks) more efficiently.

- In less than two years, \$168,738 (total PD cost in salary and benefits) has been expended under the current alarm ordinance with 99% of all alarm calls being cleared as false. This equates to approximately three full-time officer positions based on the median salary/benefits. Additional benefits include;
- Police positions can be deployed to provide a better response time to other calls for service, increase patrol in higher density crime areas, and general neighborhood patrol.
- Records Clerks will have additional time to respond to internal and external report requests and input data on police reports in a more timely fashion.
- Dispatchers will be freed up to respond to officer radio requests and to answer telephones in a more timely fashion.
- The processing of alarm permits and false alarm fines, and researching and responding to appeals has created a significant workload for the Police Department's Record Bureau and the Finance Department with cases being submitted to collections for non-payment and non-response

Item #2 Photo Speed Enforcement Update

Staff recommends implementation of Option #3. The number of traffic citations issued by one photo enforcement van for speeding violations is more than the number of traffic citations issued by all current Avondale Police Officers. While it is not possible to determine if there is a direct impact on

the accident rate there is clearly a direct impact on driver behavior. Drivers modify their driving when approaching a photo speed camera or photo red-light intersection. Further, a mobile photo-speed van can be deployed to high accident areas, to areas where citizens complain of speeding vehicles, to locations where law enforcement recognizes the need for speed enforcement and to school zones. This reduces the need for uniformed police officers to conduct traffic enforcement freeing them to perform other law enforcement services.

While reviewing the photo speed enforcement program it was determined that the two existing photo red-light intersections should be modified. Staff recommends discontinuing photo red-light enforcement for right turn violations after reviewing the impact on the accident rate at these intersections in relation to red-light violations. Staff recommends the following modifications to the existing photo enforcement program;

- Discontinue right turn on red-light enforcement at both photo enforcement intersections (Dysart and Van Buren and Dysart and McDowell).
- Add speed enforcement at both red-light intersections.
- Add fixed speed enforcement on McDowell Road at Friendship Park (highest speed violation location in Avondale).

ATTACHMENTS:

Click to download

- 📄 [Salt Lake City Police Department - The False Alarm Solution - Verified Response](#)
- 📄 [Lakewood, Colorado Police Department: Verified Response](#)
- 📄 [Photo Speed Van Citations 2007-2008](#)

The False Alarm Solution: Verified Response

Salt Lake City Police Department

Abstract Scanning

False alarm calls were draining patrol resources, comprising 12 percent of all dispatched calls. They contributed to a significant backlog of calls and the average police response time to alarm activations was up to 40 minutes, well beyond the time when police could reasonably hope to apprehend an intruder. Over 99% of all alarm calls proved false. Responding officers were getting increasingly complacent and they risked injury just driving to alarm calls.

Analysis

Past efforts to reduce the volume of false alarms through permits, warnings, fines, and suspensions had only modest effect. Other approaches tried elsewhere, from cost recovery to alarm industry regulation to outsourcing alarm administration, similarly proved only moderately effective. Police response to alarms was most effective and efficient if it could first be verified that an alarm activation was indicative of suspicious activity. Private security guards were ideally suited to make this initial verification.

Alarm owners were receptive to the possibility of having private guards verify alarms once they realized how this option could improve response times and lower their costs. A few other jurisdictions had positive experiences with verified response. A legal opinion established that police were under no legal obligation to respond to all alarm activations. A sufficient number of alarm companies and private guard companies were willing and able to provide initial verification service in a timely fashion.

Response

The police department proposed a verified alarm response ordinance to the city council. A campaign to inform the public, elected officials, and the alarm industry about the purposes and advantages of verified response was undertaken. The city council passed the ordinance and the police department conducted training for private guards to prepare them for their new responsibilities.

Assessment

The volume of alarm-related police calls for service dropped by 90 percent during the first nine months the verified response ordinance was in effect, compared to the same time frame one year prior. Average private guard response times to alarm activations has been much faster than the previous average police response times. Average police response time to other high priority calls for service dropped from five to three minutes. There has been no increase in the number of reported burglaries. The apprehension rate of burglars caught on site actually increased. Revenues for alarm companies and private guard companies have increased through collection of a modest additional monthly fee from alarm owners. Average costs to alarm owners have reduced due to reduced city alarm fines.

Commentary

The Salt Lake City Police Department's verified response to alarms project stands out for several reasons. Most obvious is the impact that verified response has had on reducing the amount of police resources consumed by highly unproductive responses to intrusion alarms. Verified response achieves reduction levels that no other response to the false alarm problem has even come close to achieving, while at the same time showing evidence that it improves the overall community response to the very

problem that alarms are intended to address-burglary. Salt Lake City's experience with false alarms prior to adopting the verified response approach was typical of that faced by so many police agencies. Salt Lake City officials justified verified response by detailed documentation of the problem through hard data and professional expertise. They carefully explored and noted the limitations of alternative strategies for reducing the false alarm burden. They methodically built up internal, community, legal, and political support for making the dramatic shift in police policy. Perhaps most importantly, they continue to work closely with the private alarm and security industry to ensure that all aspects of verified response, from legislation to private security training to police operations, remain aligned to advance the community's ultimate interest, the protection of property from burglary.

Scanning

The Salt Lake City Police Department has struggled with the problem of false alarms for the past 20 years. False alarm calls were draining patrol resources and often created a significant backlog of calls. This problem had been apparent since 1980 when the department first began tracking false alarm statistics. Police administrators were concerned that officers responding to alarm calls were getting increasingly complacent, knowing that 99 percent of alarm calls proved false. Complacency put officers checking buildings at risk. Moreover, officers risked injury just driving to alarm calls. We were aware of at least four officers in the United States and Canada who had been killed in accidents responding to alarm calls in the past two years.

Interests in the problem

We identified as stakeholders in this problem taxpayers without alarm systems, alarm owners, alarm companies, city government and the police department. Stakeholders had different interests in the problem:

- Taxpayers without alarm systems were subsidizing the costs for police response to alarms, and those police resources were therefore not available to address other public needs.
- Alarm owners wanted a quick response to their alarm signal and wanted to minimize the costs they incurred from false alarm fines.
- Alarm companies were interested in maximizing their profit, which they believed they could do best by having police investigate alarm signals at public expense.
- City government tried to balance citizen welfare with consumption of municipal resources.
- The police department was interested in conserving resources by not responding to so many false alarms and in ensuring that alarmed properties were adequately protected from burglary.
- Alarm companies' interests were summarized in a recent report on false alarms:

Alarm dealers view police as a gift to their business. They sell a system, charge monthly fees for managing effective response that is provided and paid by the general taxpayers. Dealers consider false activation to be an issue merely between the police and the customers. There is also little (apparent) interest by individual dealers to spend resources in order to solve their own and the communal problem. ¹

The impact of false alarms on city resources

False alarms appeared to be a universal problem for police. We found studies indicating that 97 to 99 percent of all alarm activations police respond to nationwide are false and they consume about 12 to 30 percent of patrol resources. Salt Lake City's false alarm problem did not appear to be unique. A number of important findings emerged from our local analysis of the problem, including the following:

- In 1999, the Salt Lake City Police Department responded to 8,213 alarm activations. Only twenty-three cases, or three-tenths of one percent, of these calls justified a police report of any sort, only a few of which were for actual burglaries.
- False alarm calls comprised 12 percent of all dispatched calls.
- Nearly \$500,000 of the police department's budget was attributable to false alarms. The personnel time alone was the equivalent of five full-time officers.² This figure does not include the amount of time complaint takers and dispatchers spent handling incoming alarm activations and the 2,100 canceled false alarm calls for 1999.
- Processing of alarm permits and false alarm fines, and adjudicating appeals created a significant workload for the police department alarm unit, the city treasurer's office, and the small claims court of appeals, respectively.
- Only \$150,000 in alarm fines was collected in 1999, which only partially offset the costs of alarm response, creating a net deficit of about \$350,000. Alarm permits were required, but were free of charge. (We did not support charging for alarm permits because we felt it created an unwritten promise that police would respond on alarm activations.)
- All taxpayers, regardless of whether they had alarm systems or not, were subsidizing through that portion of their taxes that were spent responding to false alarms false alarm response for the 12 percent of the city's residences and businesses with alarms.
- The average response time to an alarm activation was 40 minutes and occasionally took as long as two-and-a-half hours. Some aggressive alarm sales representatives were making false and unrealistic promises to their customers about how quickly the police would respond to alarms, a matter over which the alarm companies had no control. In fact, due to the tremendous number of alarm activations and the number of false alarms, the priority for alarm activations was downgraded in 1992 to preserve resources for higher priority calls for service such as domestic violence.
- Locally we found that alarm owners became increasingly frustrated by false alarms and the consequent fines. They vented their frustration at both the police department and their alarm companies. Sixty percent of the phone calls received by the police department's alarm unit were from frustrated citizens.
- False alarms in Salt Lake City had three main causes: user errors due to insufficient training³; inadequate verification by alarm company monitoring stations; and improper installation, inferior equipment and application for the alarm site.

Analysis: Part I

How effective was the current response and what alternatives were available?

As early as 1980, Salt Lake City officials realized that preventive measures were needed to reduce false alarms. The city adopted a false alarm ordinance in 1981 that required a permit, established fines for false alarms that exceeded specified limits, and required the alarm owner to disconnect the alarm after excessive alarms. There were no means to enforce the disconnection provision, however. In 1994, a more stringent alarm ordinance was adopted allowing four "free" false alarms and charging a \$100 fine on the fifth alarm. Alarm owners were charged even for false alarms caused by faulty equipment or faulty alarm installation. This 1994 ordinance resulted in a 16 percent decrease in false alarms in the first year after it was adopted, however the following year false alarms increased by 13 percent. These ordinances were only marginally effective, and considering the rising number of new alarm owners, the permit and fine approaches were like putting a finger in the dam to stop the flooding. These responses helped manage, but did not solve, the false alarm problem.

Alternative responses to false alarms

We researched other police departments' efforts to manage their false alarm problems. We found everything from smaller jurisdictions doing nothing to larger jurisdictions dedicating up to twelve employees to deal with false alarms. Police officers were being utilized in a variety of capacities such as inspecting alarm systems and hanging notices on citizens' doors to increase awareness of the problem. Alarm unit staff were billing and tracking false alarms, and sponsoring false alarm awareness courses. Despite intense efforts by many police departments, false alarm rates persisted at over 97 percent false and alarm calls constituted from 12 to 30 percent of total dispatched calls for police service. The following are some of the false alarm reduction efforts we discovered other police departments attempting:

Traditional Regulatory Ordinance

The most common was the regulatory ordinance consisting of processing permits, warning letters, a certain number of "free" false alarm responses, fines, and suspension of police response to alarm systems with excessive false alarms. Our department adopted this approach as early as 1981. This ordinance attempted to manage the problem, but had no significant long-term reduction. It was very labor intensive for our alarm unit, the treasury department and required an extensive software program. With four "free" alarms, alarm owners were often negligent about solving the problem until the fifth alarm was imminent. Alarm owners placed on suspension received no response to their alarm from the police department and usually had not selected an alternate provider to do so. Thus, when their alarm signaled, no response was forthcoming. Suspension provisions in this traditional ordinance dealt with the chronic false alarm abuser. However, new alarm owners who were poorly trained and unfamiliar with the use of their alarm system caused the bulk of the false alarms. The fines seemed punitive to citizens, complaints were vigorous, and most alarm owners blamed their alarm company for their false alarms.

Cost Recovery

This method requires a permit with an annual renewable fee. Once again this is very labor intensive for the alarm unit and may require additional personnel. There are usually no suspension features and police continue to respond to all alarm signals. Fees would have to be significantly increased in order to reclaim the full costs of patrol response and would be a financial burden to many alarm owners. The police department seldom retains the monies from the alarm response as it usually goes directly to the municipality's general fund.

Alarm Industry Regulatory

Only a small number of cities use the method of requiring the alarm company to collect false alarm fines from their customers and remit it to the city. One city charges \$73 for every alarm call coming into the communications center. Alarm companies typically resist this approach even to the point of threatening legal challenges. Some police departments were attempting to restrict the alarm monitoring stations' actions by requiring that the alarm monitoring operator place a telephone call to the alarm site to determine if the alarm signal was in error and if the person who answered the telephone knew the pass code. Another approach was to require the monitoring company to receive signals from two different alarm zones before requesting a police dispatch.

Alarm monitoring stations are not necessarily located in the same city as the customers they serve. They may be located hundreds of miles away, deal with thousands of police departments, and answer alarm signals for millions of alarm customers. Each police jurisdiction may require different specifications for alarm response, but that does not mean the monitoring company will comply. It is difficult for a police department in California, for example, to try to dictate to a monitoring company in Florida, which approach to use. At least one monitoring company we know of refuses to cancel a request for a police dispatch if the dispatch has aged more than 15 minutes, even if the alarm owner can verify the alarm is in error.

Outsourcing Collection Agency

In this approach the police department responds to alarm calls, but the administrative tasks of issuing permits, sending out fine notices, and collecting fines is contracted to a private firm. Usually, the private firm returns a small percentage of the fines collected to the municipality. As with other methods, this method merely manages the problem, it does not solve it.

Conclusions from the first phase of analysis

The police department's attempt to manage false alarms with ordinances consisting of warnings, fines and permits had no significant long-term effect and only minimal short-term effect on the overall reduction of alarm activations or the percentage of false alarms. Nearly all alarm activations were false and the current system was yielding slow police response times that were of little value to either the police or alarm owners. The probability of catching burglars in the act after 40 minutes was slim. Even the alarm industry did not believe that police response added much value. The Utah Alarm Association conceded that 90 percent of the deterrent value of an alarm system was in the signs and stickers posted on the premise. The public costs of the current system far exceed what were being recovered in fines. Continuing to waste police resources was not in the best interest of public safety.

We concluded that police response to an alarm signal only made sense if some eyewitness could first verify the signal that the alarm may indeed be valid. Private security guards were a logical fit for this role. We concluded that the initial verification of an alarm activation was a private sector responsibility. Consequently, we began to explore the feasibility of shifting the primary responsibility for verifying alarms signals from the police to the private alarm and security companies. We refer to this practice as "verified response".

Analysis: Part II

Was verified response feasible?

To explore the feasibility of implementing verified response, the alarm unit began a campaign to increase alarm owners' awareness that they could contract with a private guard company as the first

responder to their alarm signal. Most alarm owners were otherwise unaware of this option. The first step was to provide alarm permit holders with a listing of private guard services in the mailing with all new permits issued in 1998 and 1999. The number of false alarms decreased by 7 percent from 1998 to 1999 and we had reason to believe that this reduction was at least partially due to offering alarm owners this private response option. Indeed, many alarm owners told us they appreciated having an option of paying for the less expensive services of a private guard responder rather than paying false alarm fines to the city. Some alarm owners even told us that they didn't want "their" officers wasting time on a false alarm. Such comments reflected a feeling among citizens that they preferred that officers were available to respond to genuine emergency calls.

Our search for other police agencies' experiences with verified response led us to the Las Vegas Metro Police Department. The Las Vegas Metro Police Department implemented a verified response policy in 1991. Said Las Vegas police captain Mike Ault:

This policy has been effective for us for more than eight years. Terrorists didn't take to the streets when we implemented the policy. In fact, as it relates to the population, the burglary rate is actually going down. ⁴

A few other jurisdictions had adopted verified response policies or ordinances including: Henderson, Nev.; Lane County, Ore. Sheriff's Office; and West Valley City and Taylorsville, Utah.

We concluded that alarm ownership is a private, personal choice, not mandated by law, the city or the police department. Our research found no legal challenges to these verified response ordinances and policies. According to the Salt Lake City Attorney's Office, "Law enforcement did not have a legal liability to respond to alarms and the alarm contract is a civil contract between two private entities." ⁵ Concluded the author of the article describing Las Vegas's policy:

The police have no legal responsibility to respond to any given situation unless mandated by local law. Litigation aimed at forcing response compliance is unlikely to succeed because this law is so clearly stated and so well understood by judiciaries. ⁶

We explored the costs associated with verified response and concluded that private alarm companies could feasibly recover the costs of responding to alarms from their customers. When West Valley City (population of 100,000 located eight miles to the west of Salt Lake City) adopted their verified response policy in May 2000, alarm companies operating in that community began charging their customers an additional \$5 per month to pay for a private guard response.

To gauge availability of private guards responding to alarm activations, the police department sent a survey to all private guard firms listed in the Salt Lake City telephone directory asking if they would be interested in responding to burglar alarms and, if so, what they estimated their average response time would be. Nine companies responded positively with estimates of average response times ranging from three to fifteen minutes.

As noted by several researchers, "Already private security guards fulfill most security functions and they number more than three times the total number of federal, state, and local law enforcement personnel." ⁷

On the basis of our research we concluded that a verified response policy was indeed feasible and enough private security companies were willing and able to respond to alarm signal activations.

Response

We therefore proposed to the city council a new ordinance. The major elements of the proposed verified response alarm ordinance were:

- To require eyewitness verification of all alarm activations by alarm company personnel or a private guard. If they discover suspicious circumstances, they would call the police department.
- Police will continue to respond to human-activated alarms such as robbery, panic and duress alarm signals. The first false alarm of these types incurs a \$50 fine and is based on an escalating fine structure.
- Alarm owners can participate in a false alarm prevention course in lieu of one false alarm fine per year.
- False alarms that are caused by the alarm company technician are charged to the alarm company rather than the alarm owner.

We realized that educating citizens, business owners and the city council on false alarm issues would be crucial to passage of the verified response alarm ordinance. The average citizen had many misperceptions of the police resources and taxpayer monies involved in false alarm response. The city council members were astonished to learn of the high percentage of false alarm calls.

We contacted all local television stations and newspapers and briefed them on the proposed policy and the rationale behind it. All were willing to cover the story. The majority of the resulting stories were favorably inclined towards the proposed policy.

Upon hearing of the proposed policy, some citizens called the alarm unit to express concern. When we explained that they would receive faster response to their alarm activation from the private guard service than they could expect from the police, would pay a small fee (rather than the \$100 ordinance fines), and if the alarm was valid, the police would respond more quickly than they had in the past, a vast majority of the citizens we spoke to supported the ordinance. In the first month after the news stories broke, we received more than 100 phone calls, with only two callers remaining opposed to the proposed policy.

We again presented the proposed verified response policy to local alarm companies. Salt Lake City and several other local police agencies had been meeting with some of the alarm companies and members of the Utah Alarm Association for the past five years so this was not the first time the alarm industry had heard about verified response. One of the Utah Alarm Association's early objections to verified response was the cost to alarm companies to respond to and investigate false alarms. This concern was addressed when alarm companies realized they could pay for this added service by charging alarm owners an additional modest \$5 monthly fee. One alarm company even allowed their customers three "free" responses before charging a fee.

The Salt Lake City Police Department offered a three-hour training course to all state licensed guard companies. Improving cooperation between police and the private guard sector was one of the goals of this training. The training stressed that the private guards' role was only to observe and report at the alarm activation scene and not to enter or search the building or try to apprehend offenders. They were instructed that if they discovered an open door, they were to contact the police department and not enter the premise. A call from a guard discovering an open door, broken window or any criminal activity would result in a "possible burglary in progress" call, a top priority call. Our police department attorney

reviewed and approved the lesson materials. Other subjects covered in the training included safety tactics, initial approach, cover and concealment, crime scene containment, and suspect identification. One of the most popular subjects was the Utah state statutes and codes governing the elements of the crimes of burglary and criminal trespass, and laws governing private guards' authority to use force to arrest and defend themselves and others.

The Salt Lake City Council set a briefing date for the police administration to present the ordinance to them. In the staff report to the council it was noted that:

The policy in this proposal may be consistent with guidelines to mitigate City expense in situations where individuals, through personal choices that may not be available to all City residents, are creating additional consumption of municipal resources.

In order for the alarm industry to have sufficient time to participate in the discussions involving the proposed ordinance changes, a public hearing was scheduled one month after the initial briefing. Police administrators briefed the city council on false alarm issues. The police union president wrote a strong letter of support for the verified response ordinance to the city council.

The ordinance was passed by the city council on a 4-2 vote on September 12, 2000. One council member who had a family member in the alarm industry voted against the ordinance. Some of the comments from city council members were:

The better argument supports taking the resources now being used to address situations which were not of the highest priority and use them to address needs of a higher priority.

No matter what side a person was on, it was an undisputed fact that there is a 99 percent false factor involved in alarm system calls. There is not a program in the City which, if only 1 percent effective, would survive scrutiny for even a moment. If properly implemented, an appropriate method of having security companies show up made a lot of sense. This would free up officers to do what they were supposed to do. The police department was not asking to change the ordinance because they did not want to serve the citizens; they were asking to change it because it was not effective and did not work. It makes sense to create a competitive alarm business, where good alarm companies thrived and poor companies went out of business, because taxpayers of Salt Lake were no longer subsidizing them.

The city council further decreed that the ordinance would take effect three months after it was enacted to allow the alarm companies time to mobilize their private guards and educate the public on the upcoming changes. The ordinance took effect December 1, 2000.

Certified letters were sent to all alarm and monitoring companies to inform them of the changes. In order to reach all citizens of Salt Lake City, an article explaining the drain on police resources caused by false alarms and the new requirements for private guard response was included in two issues of the water bill. This was an efficient way to reach all affected citizens.

Assessment

Benefits to the Police Department

The Salt Lake City Police Department experienced a 90 percent decrease in alarm-related calls for service during the first nine months the verified response ordinance was in effect, from December 1,

2000 to August 1, 2001, compared to the same time frame one year prior. This represents 6,338 fewer calls for service or the equivalent of five full-time police officers (valued at about \$400,000). This time and money is now available for higher priority police services. There are fewer backlogs of calls for service. Responses to high priority calls for service have dropped from five to three minutes. Today, the probability that a crime has in fact occurred when police are called to an alarm activation is much higher. There has been a corresponding decrease in the workload of police call takers and dispatchers, the alarm unit, the city treasury department, and the court of appeals.

Initially, alarm company spokespersons said they believed that burglaries in the city would increase when police ceased to become the first responders to the alarm signal. We have not found this to be the case. The number of burglaries have remained consistent over the past two years and even decreased by 24 percent from burglaries in 1998. Passage of the ordinance on December 1, 2000 made no significant impact on the number of burglaries.

Six burglars were arrested by police as a result of private security guards' response to alarms on 720 police responses during the first nine months of the ordinance enactment. By comparison, in 1999, prior to adoption of verified response, only five burglars were arrested on 10,200 police responses to alarm signals.

Said Salt Lake City Watch Commander Zane Smith:

In the first three months of enforcement, this alarm ordinance has returned more patrol hours to our department and helped to decrease the backlog of calls better than anything attempted in the past 15 years.

Benefits to Alarm Owners

The benefits of verified response to alarm owners include a six to fifteen minute alarm activation response time from private guard companies, far lower than what the police were able to provide; lower average costs from the modest monthly fee than most alarm owners were paying in fines for false alarms; and continued police response to human-activated alarms such as robbery, panic or duress signals.

Benefits to the alarm industry

The alarm industry benefits from verified response in that they are now providing their customers with a valued quick response to alarm activations; they can redirect time and effort into serving their customers rather than trying to appease police; and they have increased their revenue from the additional monthly fees charged to customers.

The following quote from the president of the Utah Alarm Association reveals how verified response has affected the alarm industry:

Most of the members of the Utah Alarm Association believe it is a win-win situation for everybody. It is cheaper and easier for the alarm companies. It has been burdensome dealing with the police in the past. All I do is call a guard, and the guard is more than happy to have my business. ⁸

Prior to passage of the verified response alarm ordinance, one alarm company had a guard division in place and merely needed to hire some additional guards. The police department provided a list of nine state-licensed and bonded guard companies to those alarm companies that needed to subcontract with guard companies in order to respond to alarm activations. Alarm company representatives we spoke with have indicated that their sales have not been impacted by the shift to private guard response.

Citizens are continuing to purchase alarm systems.

Verified response has shifted the management of the false alarm problem from the police to alarm owners and the alarm companies they choose to do business with. Economic supply and demand will now govern the delivery and cost of private security responses to alarm activations. If a guard company's performance proves unsatisfactory, the competition will provide another company to take its place.

Salt Lake City's verified response alarm ordinance is a long-term solution to the false alarm problem, a problem that our department had been struggling with for twenty years. By no longer attempting to manage a private sector problem, we believe we have solved the false alarm problem for the police department.

Shanna Werner
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Salt Lake City, UT 84111
Phone: (801) 799-3113
Shanna.Werner@ci.slc.ut.us

¹ Erwin Blackstone, Simon Hakim and Uriel Spiegel. "Government Competes and Retreats, Public Gains: Shedding Police Response to Burglar Alarms." January 23, 2001. Center for Competitive Government at Temple University: Philadelphia, Pa.

² Each alarm call requires two officers for an average half hour on each alarm call at an average wage of \$60 per hour. This figure includes salary, benefits, and the amortized costs of the police car, computer and equipment.

³ Commercial intrusion alarms accounted for two-and-a-half times the number of residential alarms, mostly due to employees who did not have or remember the alarm code, and to cleaning crews inadvertently setting off the alarm while working. Residential alarms tend to be activated by children and relatives who do not know how to use the alarm system, and by the motion of pets, insects, ceiling fans, and even floating balloons. The National and Burglar Alarm Association calculate that 76 percent of alarm activations are caused by user error.

⁴ "Las Vegas PD Gambles on No Response Policy and Wins." Donna Englander, Security Sales magazine, December 1998.

⁵ Salt Lake City Attorney's Office. Roger F. Cutler, City Attorney. Salt Lake City and County Building, Room 505, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111, Tel. (801) 535-7788.

⁶ "Las Vegas PD Gambles on No Response Policy and Wins." Donna Englander, Security Sales magazine, December 1998.

⁷ Erwin A. Blackstone, Simon Hakim and Uriel Spiegel. "Response to Alarms: A New Type of Club Good." March 2000. Drs. Blackstone and Hakim are professors of economics and members of the Center for Competitive Government at Temple University in Philadelphia.

⁸ "No police when alarm goes off? No problem." Laura Hancock, Desert News, December 28, 2000.

04-10
April 2004

VERIFIED ALARM RESPONSE POLICY

Background

For many years, our agency has averaged well over 6,000 intrusion alarms per year, accounting for nearly 10% of the total annual citizen-generated calls for service. Of those calls, about 98% are consistently found to be false alarms, in each case requiring the response of two agents who are then unavailable for other calls during their investigation of the alarms.

The 98% false alarm rate is consistent with that of police departments throughout the nation, and like those departments, our efforts to reduce the number of false alarms have been unsuccessful. Our city ordinance, mandating a billing system with sliding fees for successive false alarms, cost nearly \$250,000 per year to administer, yet generated less than \$100,000 per year in revenue. More important, it had no effect on the false alarm rate.

Beginning in late 2001, we began examining the success of programs known as Verified Alarm Response. In 2003, at the request of the Metropolitan Association of Chiefs of Police, representatives from 10 Denver metropolitan area agencies began meeting to develop a proposed model alarm response policy. In late 2003, the Metropolitan Association of Chiefs of Police approved it for adoption.

The Lakewood Police Department remains fully committed to the immediate response to robbery, panic, medical, and fire alarms. The department has decided, however, to adopt Verified Alarm Response as our method for handling intrusion alarms, effective June 1, 2004. The following policy, specific to the needs of our department and Lakewood citizens, has been approved.

New Policy

9020 Alarms

A. Policy

The Lakewood Police Department will dispatch and respond to all robbery, panic, and fire alarms. Such alarms will receive a high priority response each time they are activated.

Due to the overwhelming number of false mechanically activated intrusion alarms, the Lakewood Police Department will not routinely respond to mechanical alarms unless additional information is received to verify the validity of such an alarm.

Nothing in this policy prevents any department member from utilizing discretion and choosing to respond to a mechanically activated intrusion alarm when appropriate. Personal knowledge of crime patterns in the area, time of day, or other information at the disposal of the employee, may justify the need for a response. The decision to respond to such an alarm can be made by an employee of any rank. Under certain circumstances, supervisors and command officers may require a police response if a need is identified (i.e., a pattern of burglaries).

B. Procedure

1. Robbery, fire, panic, and other alarms brought to the attention of Communications Center personnel are forwarded to the appropriate patrol or fire department personnel.
2. Patrol agents dispatched to alarms investigate the circumstances surrounding the alarm and take enforcement action where warranted.
3. The department will not routinely respond to mechanically activated intrusion alarms without verification of the validity of the alarm, by the alarm company or other sources, or additional information that that would lead a reasonable person to believe that the alarm warranted a response from patrol agents. The department may accept verification by one or more of the following means:
 - a. Multiple alarm trips, or alarm trips of varying origins, indicating entry into the premises (ex: a perimeter alarm followed by activation of a motion detector);
 - b. Verification by the alarm company of a crime or suspicious circumstances;
 - c. Cameras or audio devices, monitored by an alarm company, that indicate a crime may have occurred;

- d. Witness reports of glass breakage, suspicious activity, or other information that corroborates the alarm; or
 - e. Any other events or circumstances that indicate the alarm may be valid.
4. All mechanically activated intrusion alarms received by the Communications Center will be aired for informational purposes to the appropriate sector patrol units. No units will be assigned to respond to the location unless the alarm is verified or there are other factors that indicate that a police response is necessary. In addition to the alarm guidelines already outlined in the Communications Center Standard Operating Procedures Manual, personnel should also inquire of the alarm company:
- a. Has a crime been verified by alarm company personnel or a third party?
 - b. Is a representative of the alarm company enroute to verify the alarm?
 - c. Has the alarm been tripped in multiple zones, or have differing types of alarms been received at the location?
5. The department will continue to respond to intrusion alarms at the following facilities:
- a. Banks, Credit Unions, and other banking facilities.
 - b. Public or private school property.
 - c. Facilities likely to contain drugs, such as pharmacies, medical warehouses, medical and veterinary offices, etc.
 - d. Weapons facilities such as gun shops, armories, etc.
 - e. City owned property. Since the police department monitors alarms installed in city owned property, agents will initially be dispatched to all intrusion alarms at city hall and satellite facilities as a means of confirming criminal activity.

Conclusion

During a time in which our department struggles to meet the legitimate public safety demands of our citizens, combined with ever dwindling resources available

to meet those demands, it is felt that this a reasonable and effective method for dealing with a significant source of our call load. Moreover, it is a call load that is rarely successful in preventing a crime, generating an arrest, or enhancing the safety of our citizens.

This policy will place the responsibility for alarm verification where it belongs; with the companies that market, sell, and install those alarms. It will also allow police agents and supervisors the ability to utilize discretion, common sense, and experience to evaluate the need to respond to intrusion alarms as they see fit.

The adoption of the policy will be followed by a period of public education. It will be important for each of us to be able to fully explain to citizens the rationale for the policy. We need to be able to assure citizens that although we are handling intrusion alarms in a different manner, this response method will allow us to spend our time on the alarms that are most likely to uncover criminal activity and generate an arrest.

Questions and Answers

- *If an alarm is aired, with no other form of verification, should I still respond to it?* The point of this policy is to allow you the discretion to respond to mechanically activated intrusion alarms as you see fit, based on your experience, knowledge of your sector, and other factors that you may wish to consider. This policy recognizes that a silent alarm at Radio Shack at 3:00 a.m. is much different from a silent alarm at Home Depot at 7:00 a.m. An audible intrusion alarm that has no other form of verification, but is driving the neighbors crazy, would probably warrant a response. On the other hand, a silent alarm at a home that you have responded to for three out of the last four nights, may not merit a response.
- *If I choose not to respond, and a burglary is later discovered, would the department back me up?*
It is inevitable that at some point a burglary will be discovered by a home or business owner at a location that we chose not to respond to. We understand that, and yes, it will be important for us to back up your decision. Obviously we would have to address a situation in which an agent did not respond to a burglary that most reasonable agents believe would have warranted a response, but that seems very unlikely under this policy. Any agent or sergeant is free to overrule the decision not to respond, based on information or experience they may have regarding the location of the alarm.

- *Will an alarm response still require two agents?*
If the decision is made to respond to an alarm, two agents should still respond. There may be occasional situations in which an unverified alarm is aired that does not warrant a response, but you just happen to be nearby. If you wish to stop by such an alarm as a courtesy, you may do so without backup. In most cases however, if you feel the need to respond, you should do so with the assistance of another agent.
- *Do we still need to respond to alarms at city facilities?*
Yes. Since those alarms belong to the city as opposed to a third party alarm company, we are the only ones who are able to conduct the 'verification.'
- *You can almost set your watch to the daily hold-up alarms at places like Taco Bell. Do we still need to respond to those alarms?*
Yes. This policy only applies to intrusion alarms. It is critical that the public knows we will continue to respond to alarms that directly affect personal safety, as opposed to those that simply protect property. We will continue to have a priority response to all panic, medical, robbery, and fire alarms.
- *Silent alarms at banks are also a problem. Do we still need to respond to those alarms?*
Yes. There are a number of facilities that are exempted from this policy, due to the nature of their business. The policy lists them, but they include such entities as banks, schools, and businesses that typically store drugs or weapons, such as veterinary offices, pharmacies, or pawnshops.
- *Do we still have a "no response" list of businesses we no longer respond to because of an excessive number of alarms?*
No. To have a successful Verified Alarm Response policy, we must be able to show that we apply the same response criteria to all alarm holders. For those alarms that are constantly and falsely going off, nothing has really changed...instead of a "no response list," you now have the discretion to not respond to nuisance alarms like that anyway.

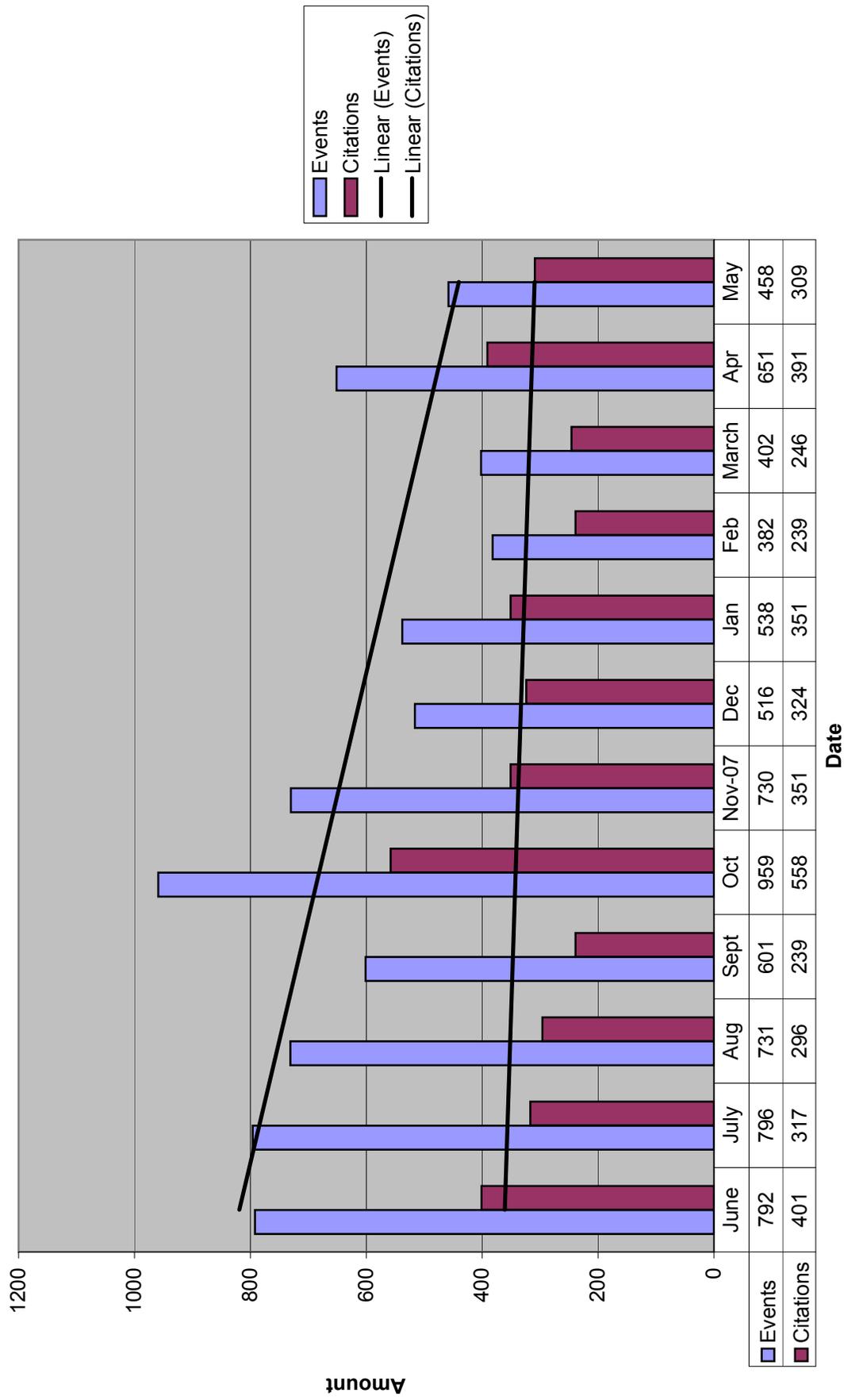
- *Do we still issue fines?*
No. The city's false alarm ordinance has been unsuccessful in reducing the problem of false alarms, and the cost of administering the ordinance far exceeded the revenue that it brought in.
- *What about car alarms?*
Car alarms are not specifically addressed in the new policy, because there is no way to require that an alarm company verify them. Nevertheless, they certainly qualify as an intrusion alarm, for which you should be able to apply discretion. Whereas you might choose to respond to a car alarm going off at an apartment complex in the middle of the night, a response would likely not be necessary in the parking lot of a busy grocery store during midday. A reported car alarm, followed by a suspicious person call or a second car alarm, would obviously warrant a response. Moreover, a nighttime car alarm that won't go off and is keeping residents awake would also warrant a response, if for no other reason than to better serve the neighbors.

Roll call presentations regarding this new policy will soon be scheduled. Please take the time to fully read this training bulletin in preparation for those discussions.

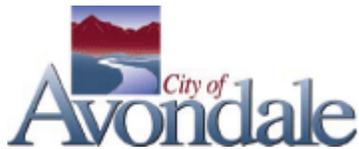
Prepared by: _____

John Camper, Division Chief
Support Services Division

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CITY COUNCIL REPORT

SUBJECT:
Landscape Ordinance Text Amendment Proposal

MEETING DATE:
February 2, 2009

TO: Mayor and Council
FROM: Brian Berndt, Development Services Director (623) 333-4011
THROUGH: Charlie McClendon, City Manager

PURPOSE:

Staff is requesting City Council direction on a new proposed Landscape Ordinance. Staff will present the main intent and discussion points of the new ordinance seeking feedback and recommendations.

DISCUSSION:

Landscape design and implementation are considered key elements of any development project. Avondale has struggled with realizing the proposed vision it approves at the site plan review stage and the actual constructed results of that promised vision. Staff felt one way to ensure implementation of that goal would be to review the current ordinance language relevant to landscape design and implementation measures, and propose amendments, additions, and specific language to articulate more clearly the City's expectations. After reviewing Section 12 of the Zoning Ordinance (Design Standards for Commercial and Industrial Districts), where landscape requirements and regulations are found, several important aspects have been identified and addressed with the current Landscape Ordinance proposal. Staff's objective, with the City Council's direction, is to facilitate a solid basis for a thorough, innovative, and user-friendly design and regulatory tool.

The ordinance is made up of two main components: Landscape requirements, and wall requirements. The Landscape component covers key aspects of site development relevant to landscape design review, plant and landscape material criteria, landscape design, and landscape maintenance. The main points that are new to the ordinance are: 1. Clarifying landscape industry standards and definitions; 2. Providing clear plant and non-vegetative material criteria including, but not limited to, minimum tree size and tree specifications; 3. Creating design requirements per general required areas and per Zoning Districts that utilize the Design Manuals as standards, including but not limited to landscape placement, material densities, and overall visual impression; 4. Implementing ordinance enforcement, related penalties, and increasing maintenance standards including a submitted landscape maintenance schedule designed to preserve the intent of the proposed landscape.

The Wall component covers general wall design provisions such as wall height standards, wall design and materials, and specifies when walls shall be provided in order to meet visual, sound, privacy, and/or glare restrictions to and from land uses. Staff's goals are: 1. To prepare a solid draft Landscape Ordinance that addresses and resolves the design disconnect from start to finish of a project. 2. To present the proposed Ordinance in a proper and inclusive manner to the appropriate governing bodies, the development community, and the public. 3. Create the final draft for presentation and adoption by City Council.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff will make a presentation that discusses the upcoming Landscape Ordinance and related changes to its Section and the Zoning Ordinance inclusively. The City Council may pose questions

to staff, and offer comments and direction as to which way they would like the proposed amendment to go and what extent and breadth it should cover.

This item is for information and discussion only. No action is required.

ATTACHMENTS:

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No Attachments Available