

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA

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

WORK SESSION
December 14, 2009
6:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER BY MAYOR ROGERS

1 ROLL CALL BY THE CITY CLERK

2 VERIFIED ALARM RESPONSE PROGRAM

Staff will discuss with Council the Verified Alarm Response concept whereby Police Officers will only respond to alarm activations upon verification of a suspected criminal event, but will continue to respond to all Robbery and Panic Alarms. For information, discussion and direction only.

3 CRIME FREE MULTI-HOUSING SERVICES

Staff has invited representatives from Sterling Crime Free, (SCF) a private company that partners with police departments to implement programs that assist in the reduction of police calls for service. This reduction can lead to a decrease in the crime rate and better use of police resources at no cost to the police department. For information, discussion and direction only.

4 ADJOURNMENT

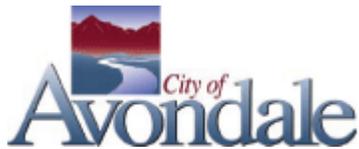
Respectfully submitted,

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.

Personas con necesidades especiales de accesibilidad, incluyendo personas con impedimentos de vista u oído, o con necesidad de impresión grande o interprete, deben comunicarse con la Secretaria de la Ciudad at 623-333-1200 o TDD 623-333-0010 cuando menos dos días hábiles antes de la junta del Concejo.



CITY COUNCIL REPORT

SUBJECT:
Verified Alarm Response Program

MEETING DATE:
December 14, 2009

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

PURPOSE:

Staff will discuss with Council the Verified Alarm Response concept within the City of Avondale. Under this concept Police Officers only respond to alarm activations upon discovery of a suspected criminal event, but will continue to respond to all Robbery and Panic Alarms.

BACKGROUND:

On October 17, 2005, Staff brought forth to City Council a request to revise the then current Avondale City Ordinance pertaining to Alarm Systems, 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 systems. Enhanced assessment fees were also added.

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

During 2006, the City of Avondale and the Police Department informed citizens and alarm companies about 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 Alarm Systems and in particular false alarms.

For two years, eight months, the Records Bureau and the department's 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 10,337 alarm calls for service (robbery, panic and burglary) between January of 2007 and August of 2009, and the approximate total time (in hours and minutes) and approximate 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 - August 2009

	Communications	Patrol	Records	Final Total
Hours/Minutes	300:00	2,939:00	3,446:00	6,685:00
Salary/Benefits	\$9,736	\$111,094	\$100,279	\$221,109

During this same period of time, the Records Bureau accepted 1,666 alarm registration forms, sent out 3,701 warning/violation notices for false alarm activations and billed \$233,710 in fees and fines. Of this amount only \$111,660 in assessment fees was actually collected. An additional \$29,300 in assessment fees was dismissed upon appeal and \$92,750 in assessment fees due were ignored and have been turned over to the City Finance Department for possible collection.

Burglary Alarms

Between January of 2007 and August of 2009, the Avondale Police Department responded to 9,221 burglary alarms. A minimum of two patrol officers are assigned to each of these calls. Of the calls received, 98% (9,024 calls) were false burglary alarms. 205 police reports were taken and a total of twelve arrests were made/eventually made.

Panic Alarms

Between January of 2007 and August of 2009, the Avondale Police Department responded to 869 panic alarms. A minimum of two patrol officers are assigned to each of these calls. Of these calls 99% (863) 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 and August of 2009, the Avondale Police Department responded to 247 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.

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 the Police Department to use discretion, common sense and experience to evaluate the need to respond to various alarm types based upon the circumstances of the call.

Patrol officers 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 that 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.

Alarms activated by individuals such as robbery, panic and duress alarms shall remain a high priority and will be responded to no differently by Avondale Police Officers.

DISCUSSION:

At the February 09, 2009 Council Meeting, the concept of a Verified Alarm Response Program was approved by Council. However, prior to a formal approval of the Program, Council requested follow-up on several action items and questions. That information is as follows:

- Continue to monitor our response to all alarm calls for service
 - For two years and eight months (January 2007 through August of 2009) we have continued to monitor our response to all alarm calls for service. A 98% false alarm rate has been maintained reference burglary alarms, responding to a total of 9,221 burglary alarms. A 99% false alarm rate has been maintained reference panic alarms, responding to a total of 869 panic alarms. A 100% false alarm rate has been maintained reference robbery alarms, responding to a total of 247 robbery alarms. A minimum of two to three officers are sent to each of these calls which has cost the City of Avondale approximately \$221,109 (salary/benefits) for Communication Staff, Police Officers and Records Clerks to handle/process. NOTE: There has been no change in the false alarm rate (burglary, panic, and robbery alarms) since January of 2007 when we started tracking these calls for service.
- Engage neighboring jurisdictions
 - Staff presented the February 09, 2009 Council Report in a meeting that included all West Valley Police Chiefs. This information was subsequently sent to all East Valley Police Chiefs, as well. After the presentation, additional requests for information on the proposed program were received from the Maricopa and Chandler Police Departments. In October of 2009, the City of Goodyear requested additional information.
 - At the GAIN/Resident Appreciation Night Event held on October 09, 2009, the Police Department distributed a flyer that provided a snapshot of the Verified Alarm Response Program. We have not received any response from those who attended the event and received the flyer.
- Any success stories within the City of Avondale
 - After receiving and paying multiple assessment fees for false alarm violations, the Littleton Elementary School took it upon themselves to “adopt” their own Verified Alarm Response approach to activated alarms on school grounds after hours. The school advised their alarm company that should an alarm sound, that a designated point of contact shall only be contacted. This point of contact then responds to the school, ascertains if a crime has occurred/is occurring or if there is something suspicious and then takes the appropriate action - calling the police or cancelling the alarm.
 - On November 09, 2009 at about 1AM, officers were dispatched to a burglary alarm (initially silent) call for service at the Salvation Army (DR09-66715). Officers arrived on scene and arrested two juveniles, charging them with burglary and recovering all property. This incident would fall under a verified alarm response program and would meet our established criteria two-fold:
 - Multiple alarm trips, or alarm trips of varying origins, indicating entry into the premises: Initially, a silent alarm was activated that notified the alarm company. Minutes later, an audible alarm was activated.
 - Any other events or circumstances that indicate the alarm may be valid: The time of day (1AM) and given that this was a business closed at that time of day.

- Contact IACP for any input on a Verified Alarm Response Program
 - On June 23, 2009, Staff contacted Phil Lynn, Manager of the IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center. Mr. Lynn advised that, according to his research, there have been no established policies recommended/drafted by IACP pertaining to a Verified Alarm Response, as alluded to by the Alarm Industry. A position paper was created in October of 2002 by IACP and the Private Sector Liaison Committee that provided options to law enforcement for responses to alarm calls for service, to include a Verified Alarm Response.
 - Mr. Lynn also provided me with a paper written in September of 1993 titled False Alarm Perspectives: A Solution-Oriented Resource, co-authored by IACP and Ohlhausen Research, Inc. As written in this paper over 16 years ago, the purpose was to “bring together a range of information and resources” that could be used to develop a solution to the problem of false alarms within a jurisdiction. Again, the Alarm Industry alluded to this paper as IACP being unsupportive of a Verified Alarm Response, which is not the case.
- In March of 2007, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, a research driven entity, authored a guide on *The Problem of False Burglar Alarms*. An overview of their findings are as follows:
 - “Purchasers of an alarm system are told to expect a police response to an alarm activation, even though they bought the system from a private alarm company with no link to a police department.” (Page 2)
 - “The vast majority of alarm calls - between 94 and 98% - are false. In other words, alarms reliability, which can be measured by these rates of false activations, is generally between 2 and 6%.” (Page 2)
 - “Research suggests that false burglar alarms result from three main causes: user error, faulty or inappropriately selected equipment and poor installation, including failing to install motion detectors in sensible areas or at appropriate heights.” (Page 4)
 - “Studies from both the United States and the United Kingdom have shown burglar alarms to be among the most effective burglary-deterrence measures. However, a number of other measures that do not impose a substantial burden on police are also effective at preventing burglary.” (Signs of occupancy is the biggest deterrent followed by closed-circuit television, window bars, barking dogs, nosy neighbors and motion activated lights.) “Burglars avoid alarmed premises because easier choices are usually available. Given the availability of non-alarmed premises and similarly unprotected targets (such as houses with open garage doors or windows), burglars may be deterred by the mere presence of an alarm company's window sticker or yard sign.” (Page 5)
 - “Do burglar alarms account for burglary declines in the United States? The U.S. burglary rate has declined steadily and substantially since the early 1980's. During the same time, the number of premises with alarms rose, but there is no evidence of a link between the two. During the 1990's through 2004, when alarm ownership experienced a steep rise, other types of crime declined just as sharply as burglary, suggesting that factors other than an increase in the number of alarm systems fueled the burglary decline.” (Page 5)
 - “Are alarms an efficient and effective way to catch burglars? Although burglary remains one of the most frequently reported crimes, the clearance rate for U.S. burglaries has remained below 15% for many years. Clearly, whatever contribution burglar alarms are making to solving burglary cases is modest, at best. **The available research does not provide much support for alarms' value in catching burglars. One study found that police were more likely to catch burglars in the act on premises without alarms than those with alarm systems. Police responses to burglary calls at locations without alarms are typically the result of an eyewitness, such as a neighbor, which is more reliable than an alarm.**” (Page 6)
 - “The fact that alarm calls are overwhelmingly false and do not contribute substantially to police ability to apprehend burglars makes the underwriting of alarm response by police and entire

communities (all taxpayers subsidize police response to alarmed properties) an expensive and inefficient approach to burglary reduction across an entire jurisdiction.” (Page 10)"]

- The number one specific response to reduce false burglar alarms, as suggested by this research, was a verified response.
- “Verified response typically involves visual on-scene verification of a break-in. Verification may also be established by remote video surveillance. Audio intrusion detection technology is also available.” “By requiring alarm monitoring companies to screen alarm activations, police response is reserved for true break-ins, actual attempts and holdup, duress, and panic alarms.” (Page 16)
- Cities adopting verified response have found enormous decreases in the number of alarm calls, typically around 90%, which improves police response times to other types of calls. In 2000, Salt Lake City, Utah, adopted verified response using visual verification. By significantly reducing the number of calls to which officers needed to respond, the Salt Lake City Police Department gained an equivalent of five full-time officers, decreased the workload of call-takers and dispatchers, and decreased the response time to other calls for service.” (Page 17)
- “The IACP (supported by the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association and the Central Station Alarm Association) recommends an approach to reducing false alarms that includes, among other things, telephone (or other electronic) verification by alarm companies and notification to alarm owners every time their alarm activates. The difference between this approach and verified response is that the latter requires the alarm company to make visual or video verification, eliminating the police response to almost all false alarms.” (Page 17-18)
- How does Salt Lake City handle alarm activations in City buildings? Contact was made with the Alarm Coordinator with the Salt Lake City Police Department who advised that alarms that are activated in City Buildings need to be verified prior to a police response, the same as with all other residences and businesses.
- As reported in the February 09, 2009 Council Presentation, the Denver Metropolitan area was experiencing similar false alarm rates and concerns as was Salt Lake City. The Lakewood Colorado Police Department took the lead, gathering support from nine other local police departments, and in 2003, developed a Verified Alarm Response policy that was approved by the Metropolitan Association of Chiefs of Police. It is still the intent of the Avondale Police Department, much like the Lakewood Colorado Police Department did, to partner with other Valley city police departments, sharing our information relative to false alarms along with the research conducted by other organizations.

Additional Information

The Salt Lake City Police Department has been recognized nationally for its Verified Alarm Response.

- Semi-finalist: Innovations in American Government Award
- Finalist: Herman Goldstein Problem Oriented Policing Award
- Finalist: IACP Webber Seavey Award

BUDGETARY IMPACT:

It is estimated that since January 2007 the Department has spent about \$220,000 in salaries and benefits responding to false alarms. This is the equivalent of adding about three full time officers to the department.

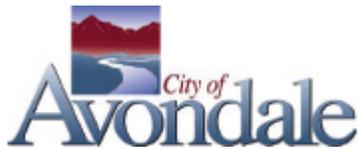
RECOMMENDATION:

No action is necessary at this time. Staff is seeking direction from Council regarding this program.

ATTACHMENTS:

[Click to download](#)

No Attachments Available



CITY COUNCIL REPORT

SUBJECT:
Crime Free Multi-Housing Services

MEETING DATE:
December 14, 2009

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

PURPOSE:

Staff has invited representatives from Sterling Crime Free, (SCF) a private company that partners with police departments to implement programs that assist in the reduction of police calls for service. This reduction can lead to a decrease in the crime rate and better use of police resources at no cost to the police department.

BACKGROUND:

Staff has reviewed an opportunity to partner with Sterling Crime Free (SCF) to implement programs previously provided by the police department, at no cost to the City. Specifically, SCF will train rental property managers in Avondale to properly screen tenants making sure they are in compliance with "crime free" guidelines. This means all tenants will not be permitted to rent at the property if the renter has a history of criminal activity that is not in compliance with "crime free" guidelines. Further, each tenant understands if any resident of their rental property is arrested, all residents renting that unit can and will be evicted from the property per existing Arizona State Law.

As more rental properties, both multi-housing and single family properties, come in compliance with this program, fewer problem tenants will be permitted to rent in Avondale. Ultimately, the goal is to train every rental property in Avondale to screen their tenants to avoid attracting tenants with a criminal history, thus reducing the amount of criminal activity in Avondale. When one tenant is evicted for failing to comply with "crime free" requirements, they will no longer be permitted to rent from any other certified crime free rental property in Avondale.

SCF, in partnership with the Avondale Police Department Crime Prevention Unit, will provide training to both rental property managers and Avondale Police employees regarding the crime free rental program. Further, SCF will provide additional training on various crime prevention techniques to other types of businesses and their owners, to include crime prevention through environmental design. SCF will also assess every rental property providing a written report for the rental property manager to use as a guideline to make changes to the physical property (crime prevention through environmental design) which further decreases the opportunity for criminal activity.

While there is no direct cost to the City of Avondale, representatives from the Avondale Police Department Crime Prevention Unit will assist SCF by arranging a city facility where training can be provided to rental property managers as well as Avondale police employees. SCF may generate a financial benefit by providing insurance at a reduced rate; this service is provided separately from any service provided by a representative of the Avondale Police Department.

BUDGETARY IMPACT:

There are no direct costs to the Avondale Police Department

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff is recommending Council authorize the partnership between Sterling Crime Free and the Avondale Police Department to establish a crime free rental program for multi-family housing as well as single family rental properties.

ATTACHMENTS:

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No Attachments Available