



**TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager  
**FROM:** Danielle Larson, Tax & License Manager, Andy Cherullo, Finance Director  
**COPY:** Government Performance & Finance Committee  
**PRESENTER:** Danielle Larson, Tax & License Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Amendments to Title 6, Chapter 6B.40 - Alarms  
**DATE:** October 15, 2024

**PRESENTATION TYPE:**  
 Request for Ordinance

**SUMMARY:**  
 Staff is proposing amendments to Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) Chapter 6B.40 related to Alarm Monitoring Companies and False Alarm Service Fees. The amendments are intended to decrease the number of false alarm calls responded to by the Tacoma Police Department (TPD) with a focus on locations that generate a higher number of false alarms every year compared to others. The amendments include 1) an increase in the fee for false alarm incidents, 2) an option to issue a No Response by TPD when an alarm user has triggered at least five false alarms in a calendar year and 3) enhanced requirements for alarm companies to confirm that an alarm call is valid prior to requesting police response.

**BACKGROUND:**  
 In 2003, a false alarm fee of \$60 was added to Title 6 assessing alarm monitoring companies a false alarm service fee for each police response to a false alarm registered to the alarm company. The new fee and licensing requirements for alarm monitoring companies was established to deter the high number of false alarms TPD was responding to in a year. Prior to 2003, TPD was responding to approximately 12,000 alarm calls annually, of which 98% were false alarms. In 2012, the false alarm fee was increased to \$100.

**ISSUE:**  
 Since the false alarm fee and monitored alarm license requirements were implemented in 2003, the number of false alarms has decreased by almost 88%. However, there are some locations that continue to trigger a high number of false alarms every year (as high as 35 from one location). In 2023, 900 locations triggered approximately 1,500 false alarm calls throughout Tacoma. Of the 900 locations, 25% of the locations triggered more than one false alarm which represents over 50% of total false alarms.

# of False Alarms in 2023	# of Addresses	Total False Alarms
1	681	681
2	115	230
3	34	102
4	26	104
5	14	70
6	7	42
7 or more	26	272
	903	1501



Responses to false monitored alarms endangers the public by preventing, diverting, or delaying police officers from patrolling a neighborhood; responding to calls for service; or investigating and solving crimes.

The proposed amendments will increase the fee for all false alarms and creates a tiered structure that increases the fee for more than two false alarms in a calendar year. Additionally, a new section will be added that after an alarm user generates at least five false alarms in a calendar year, TPD will have an option to issue a No Response from officers, excluding hold-up, robbery, and panic alarms.

**False Alarm Service Fees**

False Alarm Occurrence	Current	Proposed
1 or 2	\$100	\$115
3 or 4	\$100	\$215
5 or 6	\$100	\$265
More than 6	\$100	\$315

**Alarm Monitoring Company Requirements**

1. Alarm Confirmation – a new requirement that is included in the National Model Ordinance for Monitored Alarm Companies. Alarm Confirmation requires monitoring companies to confirm an alarm prior to requesting a police response to confirm the presence of human(s) on the property and a high probability that a criminal offense is in progress. This is accomplished by one of the following:

- Speaking to a person who can confirm the need for police response;
- The premises is equipped with an interior live-time video or audio monitored remotely by the company or the alarm user;
- The premise is equipped with a control panel which confirmed that at least two independent zones were triggered, and the monitoring company completed Enhanced Call Confirmation; or
- The alarm system is older and not in compliance with the two independent zone standard but has completed the Enhanced Call Confirmation

2. Enhanced Call Confirmation –a current requirement in the TMC which requires monitoring companies to make a minimum of two calls to attempt to verify an alarm prior to requesting a police response. Amendments include an exemption from the two-call requirement if the alarm can be verified through Alarm Confirmation.

3. Added a process for monitoring companies to request cancellation of false alarm fees when they can provide evidence that there was the presence of human(s) on the property and a high probability that a criminal offense was in progress.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

Alternatives to the proposed amendments include choosing a different amount or structure for the false alarm fees or not changing the fee at all.



**FISCAL IMPACT:**

If the proposed amendments are passed, the impact to the 2025/2026 budget is estimated to be \$140,000 for the biennium. Because the intent of the amendments is to decrease the number of false alarms, the revenues may decrease after 2025/2026.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff is recommending the proposed amendments to Title 6 Chapters 6B.10 – Alarms to 1) increase the fee for false alarm incidents, 2) add an option to issue a No Response by TPD when an alarm user has triggered at least five false alarms in a calendar year and 3) enhance the requirements for alarm companies to confirm that an alarm call is valid prior to requesting police response.