

# Preventing False Fire Alarms

Information on reducing nuisance fire alarms in commercial, residential and multi-residential buildings in the City of Surrey.

## A DANGEROUS AND COSTLY PROBLEM

Firefighters respond to thousands of nuisance fire alarms in commercial, residential and multi-residential buildings in Surrey each year. Typically, less than 1% are actual fires.

False fire alarms are a dangerous and costly problem because:

- Each alarm must be investigated, diverting firefighting resources away from real emergencies.
- People in the building may become complacent and ignore an alarm if a fire does occur.
- Businesses lose productivity while dealing with false alarms.

False fire alarms use up valuable and limited resources. Cost-recovery fees may be issued to sites with false fire alarms.

## FALSE FIRE ALARMS ARE PREVENTABLE

As a building owner, manager or occupant, there are many steps you can take to prevent false fire alarms. Routine maintenance and simple proactive measures can go a long way.

Surrey Fire Services is providing this information sheet to help you prevent false alarms and avoid potential cost-recovery fees.

- The *Surrey Security & Fire Bylaw* outlines administrative costs and establishes fees for fire department responses to false alarms on a cost-recovery basis.
- The *Surrey Fee-Setting Bylaw* outlines current rates for false fire alarms.

### CONSIDERING A THIRD-PARTY ALARM SYSTEM?

There has been an increase in false alarms from third-party fire and security alarm systems that notify the fire department of an alarm before confirming it is valid. Please be aware:

- Once fire services are called/dispatched, they must respond and investigate – even if alerted later it was a false alarm.
- Fire false alarms are subject to cost recovery fees from property owners as outlined in the *Surrey Security & Fire Bylaw No. 13168* (the “False Alarm Bylaw”).

See back for ways to prevent false alarms ►



## WORKING SMOKE ALARMS

A working smoke alarm is one of the easiest, most cost-effective ways to protect a building's occupants in the event of a fire. Working smoke alarms have been proven to save lives and to reduce fire-related injury and damage.

If you live or work in a multi-unit building, it is important to test your alarms because fire can spread quickly between units.

**Did you know? All residential buildings are required by law to have or provide working smoke alarms.**

You can request a replacement alarm from your landlord, building manager, unit owner or strata.

Go to [www.surrey.ca/homesafe](http://www.surrey.ca/homesafe) to learn more about smoke alarms.



For more information, contact  
Surrey Fire Services Fire Prevention:  
604-543-6780 or [fireprevention@surrey.ca](mailto:fireprevention@surrey.ca)  
[www.surrey.ca/fireservice](http://www.surrey.ca/fireservice)





# REDUCING NUISANCE FIRE ALARMS

Here are some common reasons for false fire alarms and simple steps you can take to can prevent them.

## DUST & INSECTS



Insects and dust can get inside and affect smoke alarms/detectors. Use the brush attachment on your vacuum to clean alarms/detectors regularly.

## STEAM



Steam can cause an alarm/detector to activate. Ensure your smoke alarms/detectors are placed away from sources of steam.

## COOKING



Cooking can cause false alarms and is also a common cause of fires. Stay in the kitchen when using the stovetop. Turn off the stove if you must leave, even for a short period of time.

## SMOKING



Smoking indoors can cause false alarms. When possible, consider smoking outdoors and dispose of smoking materials using a deep sturdy ashtray.

## PULL STATION ACTIVATION



Guards can be purchased that may it more difficult to accidentally activate the pull station and warning labels may also be used. Please contact the Fire Prevention Office to discuss.

## AGE OF SMOKE ALARM/DETECTOR



Replace outdated smoke alarms/detectors as required by the manufacturer's recommendations but at least every 10 years.

## CONSTRUCTION OR RENOVATIONS



When doing construction or renovations around smoke alarms/detectors, cover them to prevent triggering a false alarm and to prevent dust from accumulating inside. ***Make sure to remove the covers after each day of work.***

## FIRE ALARM SYSTEM SERVICING



Buildings that have a fire alarm system require maintenance. Ensure that your building's fire alarm system is being maintained by a qualified professional. Discuss false alarm procedures with your alarm company to determine when they contact the Fire Department on your behalf.

If you have questions about false fire alarms, please contact Surrey Fire Services Fire Prevention at 604-543-6780 or [fireprevention@surrey.ca](mailto:fireprevention@surrey.ca).