SIEMENS

Unwanted fire alarms put lives at risk

And cost our economy £1 billion+ each year

The complexity of buildings, density of occupation and growing user demands are heightening the urgency to introduce governance to ensure that life safety equipment fulfils its true purpose of preventing fire and saving lives.

Unwanted fire alarms caused by equipment account for approximately two-thirds of all false alarms, amounting to over 140,000 per annum; a figure that is unacceptably high. The correct design, technology selection, installation and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems virtually eliminate unwanted alarms.

False call-outs not only impact the organisations themselves in terms of loss of earnings and loss of reputation, but are also a public safety issue. When alarms go off repeatedly, there is a tendency for people to disregard them and in the case of a real fire, complacency could further endanger lives. Today's technology resolves this issue and it is false economy to install fire detection systems that put the public and organisations at risk.

Most needless call-outs are caused either by badly maintained systems, or poor quality technology that cannot distinguish false triggers such as burnt toast, steam or dust from real fire signals. Unwanted alarm alerts still automatically instigate calls to the emergency services.

A false alarm is referred to as an 'unwanted fire signal' as soon as the fire service is summoned. Due to the high number of unnecessary call-outs, which exert pressure on public sector resources, there is a growing prevalence of fines and regulation.

False fire alarms are an addressable issue

Unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) are false alarms from a fire detection system that are automatically transmitted to the Fire and Rescue Service and cost UK businesses and Fire Services an estimated £1 billion a year. There is a strong feeling across the fire industry that more stringent measures need to be taken against repeat offenders, to ensure there is a strong deterrent against tolerating sub-standard equipment and poor performance by installers and service providers.

Fire detection systems simply should not cause unwanted alarms; if an organisation suffers from excessive false alarms, the root cause is either poor technology, or poor service and maintenance support, and this is an addressable issue. The effect that false alarms have on business continuity is immense. Lost working hours and the upheaval of evacuating premises add up to significant financial loss.

At Siemens we work with organisations across a range of industries to select and apply the correct fire detectors for their location and usage; this alone reduces the chances of an unwanted alarm from the detector itself. It is the responsibility of fire alarm companies to not only install and maintain the technology, but also to advise on best use and minimisation of potential unwanted fire signals.

Siemens has created its own solution to the problem by developing advanced fire detection systems that not only deliver full protection across all buildings, but also ensure there is no risk of false alarms and the subsequent disruption that they would cause. These systems are designed to operate in extremely demanding environmental conditions where immediate and accurate fire detection is vital to life safety and business continuity. Importantly, they also determine false fire phenomena due to issues such as poor housekeeping, airborne particles, welding, humidity, cooking and temperature change, and will not alarm in these instances.

It is vital that manufacturers and installers are trained to identify and assist with customer requirements, risks and business operations. Engineering teams must be fully qualified to interpret customer specifications, CDM requirements, relevant legislation and British Standards, as well as the impact on health, safety and the environment. In particular they should be fully trained on all parts of BS 5839, the code of practice that prescribes the manner in which fire systems are designed, installed and maintained across the UK.

Customers and the public rely on the consistent performance of their health and safety operations. As one of the founding global fire safety equipment manufacturers, Siemens understands the challenges facing organisations in managing and maintaining a safe environment, as well as adhering to stringent health and safety regulations. Intelligent technology and engineering skills mean organisations can now take a zero tolerance attitude to the issue of false alarm signals.

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