

## Steps To Prevent False Alarms

1. *Notify your alarm company before testing or repairing the system.* It sounds obvious, but sometimes people forget to make the call.
2. *Know how to cancel a false alarm.* If your alarm goes off and you are absolutely certain you know what caused the alarm, notify the alarm company immediately. Have your alarm company's phone number handy. If there is any doubt as to whether there really is a fire, don't take chances – let the Fire Department check it out.
3. *Dust and smoke detectors don't get along.* Dust looks just like smoke to a smoke detector. If you are spray painting, sanding floors, installing new drywall or doing anything else that produces visible dust, there is a good chance that you will set off a smoke detector. Check with your alarm company before doing anything which will produce dust. TIP: Use your vacuum cleaner to clean your smoke alarm detectors monthly. Even ordinary household dust can build up over time and cause false alarms.
4. *Fire alarm systems need regular testing and maintenance.* You expect your fire alarm system to work when it's needed and not to cause false alarms. The only way to make that happen is to have your system tested and maintained by a technician.
5. *Deal only with qualified, licensed professionals.* The Ontario Fire Code requires any company which works on a fire alarm system to hold a special license. The Milton Fire Department can provide a list of qualified companies in our area.
6. *Fire alarm equipment must be installed properly.* Smoke detectors do not belong in kitchens, garages, attics, or outside bathrooms with showers. Heat detectors can be used to protect these areas without false alarms or photo-electric alarms can minimize the likelihood of false alarms.
7. *Treat your system with care.* Wiring and detection devices can be accidentally damaged and false alarms can result. Notify your alarm company of any damage and never attempt to repair the system yourself.
8. *Make sure the alarm company has your contact information.* Many calls we respond to the 'responsible party' information is not available. Once informed of an alarm, the Fire Department is obligated to attend the scene even if it has been confirmed on site false alarm. If no one is on site, the alarm company needs your contact information to inform you of the alarm and the Fire Department might require your assistance gaining entrance into the building.

By following the steps above, you can greatly reduce the risk of false alarms and therefore avoid the hassle and expense they can cause.

**If you would like more information regarding false alarms, please contact the Milton Fire Department Fire Prevention / Public Education Division at 905-878-9251 or visit our website:**  
**[www.milton.ca/MiltonFire](http://www.milton.ca/MiltonFire)**



**MILTON FIRE  
DEPARTMENT**



**Help Prevent  
False Fire Alarms  
'Business Guide'**



## **A Focus on Safety**

The safety of the residents of Milton and its firefighters is the first priority for the Milton Fire Department. Whenever there is an emergency requiring the Fire Department, our crews will be there to assist. At the same time, the Fire Department is working to educate businesses and citizens on ways to reduce non-emergency calls so crews can be available to respond to events where emergency help is truly needed.

If a fire alarm is activated in your home or building, it is always recommended that someone call 9-1-1. Until the cause of the alarm activation can be clearly determined, the Fire Department should be notified to ensure the safety of everyone in your home or building.

## **Commercial Fire Alarm Systems**

An automatic fire alarm system is designed to detect the unwanted presence of fire by monitoring environmental changes associated with combustion. In general, a fire alarm system is either classified as automatic, manually activated, or both. Automatic fire alarm systems can be used to notify people to evacuate in the event of a fire or other emergency, to summon emergency services, and to prepare the structure and associated systems to control the spread of fire and smoke.

The Ontario Fire Code regulates maintenance of fire alarm systems and requires regular testing and maintenance of all devices.

## **The Problem**

There are somewhere between 200 and 250 calls for residential or commercial false alarms each year. Responding to these types of false alarms, especially if they could have been prevented can be costly to the Town. More important is the undue risk firefighters are exposed to responding to these alarms. Unless we know differently, the response to a fire alarm at a house or business is as if there is a fire. With the growing number of new homes and businesses in the past 10 years, there has been a very large increase in the number of alarm investigations.

## **The Response**

The Town of Milton has a composite Fire Department comprised of both full and part time staff. Once a call is received by our Communications Center the call is put out for crews to respond. This means that our full-time on-shift staff responds immediately and part-time staff leave their homes or employment responding to the station to staff other apparatus. Depending on the location of the alarm, the Department could respond with four to 10 apparatus and sixteen 16 to 30 firefighters.

Again, the response to a residential or commercial alarm activation is as if there is a fire.

## **Fees By-Law**

The goal of the By-law is to reduce the number of false alarms to which fire crews respond each year. Fewer alarms reduce the risk to businesses, citizens and firefighters by lessening the number of responding vehicles on the road and improving available response for other emergency calls. In addition, fewer false alarms to a building or apartment mean fewer disruptions to your business and for residents.

Under the by-law, the Fire Department will not charge for the first two responses to a preventable false alarm in a calendar year. Fees will be assessed for three or more preventable alarms in a calendar year. The cost can be quite substantial as the fee is set at \$350 per truck response.

## **Preventing False Alarms**

The Fire Department encourages you to examine ways in which you can prevent future false alarms from occurring:

- Fire alarm systems should receive regular maintenance and testing to ensure they are functioning properly.
- If you are performing building maintenance or renovations, you can shut down the fire alarm system.

You may need to provide continual surveillance within the building until the fire alarm system is restored to operating condition.

- Educate contractors, tenants and building staff, including operators, cleaners and security, regarding when to take the fire alarm system off line and subsequent safety procedures to be followed.
- Be sure any ‘Hot Works’ activities (any type of work using open flames or producing heat or sparks such as cutting, welding, soldering, brazing, grinding, adhesive bonding, thermal spraying and thawing pipes) comply with specific Fire Code regulations.
- Relocate fire and smoke detectors or switch the type of detector used in certain areas of your building to reduce instances of alarms triggered by activities such as cooking. For commercial buildings, businesses and multi family dwellings, a licensed technician must work on the system.
- Monitor the use of portable cooking devices such as toasters, toaster ovens and microwaves.
- If you are a property owner or manager, consider the inclusion of a clause in the tenant and contractor contracts to make these parties responsible for any fees for alarms they may cause.