

# San Diego Fire-Rescue Department

## Fire – Harmful Gas Alarm Permitting

### Frequently Asked Questions

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The majority of alarms that the San Diego Police and Fire-Rescue Departments respond to are false, resulting in an enormous waste of resources. False alarms create an unnecessary danger to citizens, police officers, and firefighters. The City of San Diego requires permits for Burglary, Robbery, Fire, and Harmful Gas Alarm Systems for both Residential and Commercial Properties.

## *Permitting*

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### *When Do I Need a Permit?*

You will need a permit if you have a monitored fire alarm system (installed with a panel, not just smoke or carbon monoxide detectors).

The only exemptions are for municipal, county, state, federal or other government agencies.

### *How much is a Permit?*

A Fire-Harmful Gas Permit costs \$18 for a 24 month permit.

### *What if my System Monitors for both Fires and Gases, such as Carbon Monoxide?*

Your Fire-Harmful Gas Permit covers both fire sensors and gas sensors. There is no need for two permits.

### *What if my System includes a Burglary/Security Alarm?*

You will need a separate permit for the Burglary/Security component of your alarm system.

### *How Will I know that My Permit is due for Renewal?*

You will receive a notice in the mail 30-45 days prior to your permit expiring. You will have the opportunity to send in the renewal form with payment, or complete your renewal online.

### *What if I Move Into a Home or Take Ownership of a Business with a Fire or Harmful Gas Alarm System?*

Fire alarm permits are non-transferable. You will need to complete an alarm application with updated contact information. The alarm company should also provide you with information about how to avoid false alarms with your system.

### *What if I Switch Alarm Companies?*

Work with your alarm company. You will need to provide a certification from the alarm company detailing the effective date of the alarm change and information regarding the company that will now be performing monitoring services.

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#### *Do I Need a Permit if I Live in an Apartment Complex or Condominium?*

If your unit has its own alarm system panel and you have an alarm company monitoring the system for just inside your unit, then yes you will need a permit. If the fire-harmful gas alarm system is for the common areas in your building, your building owner will need a permit for each alarm system control panel in the complex.

### *False Alarms*

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#### *What Happens if My Alarm Goes Off? Will I Be Charged?*

If you have an alarm company monitoring your alarm, the Fire-Rescue Department is contacted whenever your alarm system detects fire or harmful gases. Your alarm company will attempt to contact you in an effort to verify that the alarm signal is not false. Depending on why the alarm was activated, the call may be determined to be a “False Alarm”.

“False Alarms” are tracked against your permit and if more than two occur in a calendar you will be charged a fee.

#### *How Do I Know if I Have Had a False Alarm?*

You will receive a letter in the mail if a False Alarm has been logged against your permit. You will have ten (10) business days to provide satisfactory evidence that your alarm activation did not meet the qualifications for a False Alarm under the City of San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 5 Article 5, Division 99. The alarm system official will provide written findings within five (5) days of receipt of the evidence offered.

#### *How is a False Alarm Determined?*

A False Alarm is an alarm activation causing a response by Fire-Rescue Departments when an emergency situation does not exist. This includes activations caused by mechanical failure, malfunction, accidental tripping, misuse, or negligent maintenance. It does not include activations caused by weather conditions, telephone line problems, water surges, water hammers, or any other factor over which the alarm business alarm agent, or alarm user do not have direct control.

An emergency situation is defined as any circumstance in which there is reason to believe that

- (1) There is an uncontrolled fire actively burning in or near a building or other structure;
- (2) There is a concentration of harmful gas on or near a building or other structure;
- (3) There is an identifiable risk of harm to a person or property within or near a building or other structure.

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#### *What are the Penalties if I Have Too Many False Alarms?*

Permitted systems are allowed up to two (2) false alarms per calendar year without incurring a penalty. Additional false alarms in a calendar year will incur escalating penalties plus cost recovery for time spent responding to the alarm call.

If the false alarm count exceeds two per calendar year, then a notice of revocation will be sent to the alarm permit user. The notice will request that the false alarm problem be corrected. Additionally, written evidence of correction and the revocation fee is to be submitted within 15 days of the letter being received.

For unpermitted addresses, all false alarm responses by San Diego Fire-Rescue are considered excessive and escalating penalties plus cost recovery for time spent responding to the alarm call will be billed to the owner of the building.

Following is the penalty fee schedule:

1st Excessive Response in a 1 year period.....	\$110
2nd Excessive Response in a 1 year period .....	\$220
3rd Excessive Response in a 1 year period.....	\$440
4 or more Excessive Response in a 1 year period...	\$2,200

Excessive responses by San Diego Fire-Rescue will also incur a fee of \$85 for cost recovery of time spent by the fire crew, in addition to the penalties incurred.

#### *What happens if I Have another False Alarm While My Permit is Revoked?*

Any false alarm response by San Diego Fire-Rescue while a permit is revoked is considered an excessive response. For each excessive response, a cost recovery fee and a penalty will be charged to the alarm owner (see penalty fee schedule above). If you continue to use your alarm after the revocation date and you have not appealed the revocation decision, invoices that remain unpaid after the due date will be referred to the City Treasurer for collections. Unpaid balances are subject to a collection referral fee of 10% or \$25.00, whichever is greater, up to a maximum of \$1,000, and interest. As required by law, you are hereby notified that a negative credit entry reflecting on your credit report may be submitted to a credit reporting agency if the amount is not paid by the due date. (statement that was added per collections)

#### *Can I Appeal a Permit Revocation?*

The Municipal Code allows for an independent review through the City of San Diego Business Office. You must send a letter of appeal within ten (10) days of receiving an alarm permit revocation letter to:

Administrative Hearing Coordinator  
Fire Alarm Permits  
600 B Street, Suite 1300/MS604  
San Diego, CA 92101