



The way we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) is changing

Fire alarm systems provide an early warning of fire and are one of the most effective ways to keep people safe in the event of a fire-related emergency.

Unfortunately, most calls South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) receives from automatic alarm systems are not fires, but false alarms, which means our crews are often called out unnecessarily. False alarms can be caused by cooking fumes, dust, or a lack of maintenance.

These unwanted fire signals (UFS) have a significant impact on our resources. In 2023-2024, we attended **5,982** UFS, which accounted for 31.5% of all incidents. This diverts resource from other, more worthwhile activities, including our work to reduce risk, and our vital training.

What is the change?

From **6th January 2025**, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service will adopt a sleeping risk, nighttime only (18:00 – 07:59) AFA response model.

This means we will no longer attend AFA call outs to commercial business and workplace premises, such as factories, offices, shops, and leisure facilities, unless a fire has been confirmed.

We will respond to AFA call outs at some premises during nighttime hours only (18:00-07:59). These include:

- Blocks of flats
- Sheltered accommodation
- Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)
- Prisons
- Hospitals
- Hotels/motels
- Other sleeping risk

During the daytime, the person responsible for the building should establish suitable procedures to safely investigate a fire alarm activation before calling 999. Our Control Room operators will ask for confirmation of an actual fire, or signs of fire, before sending an appliance.

Accordingly, there will be situations where an appliance will not be dispatched on receipt of a call arising from operation of a fire alarm system, unless it can be confirmed by the caller that there is a fire or indicative signs of a fire. These can include visual signs, such as flames or smoke, a smell of burning, or any other fire alarm signal.



We will always respond to confirmed fires which will attract a full or enhanced emergency response, dependent upon the information received.

For some premises, such as nursing or care homes and high-rise residential buildings that currently do not comply with fire safety law, we will continue to respond to AFA callouts during the daytime.

Private dwellings (for instance, houses) will not be affected by this proposed change.

It is anticipated that this change will greatly reduce unnecessary callouts, ensuring our crews are available for other emergency response and working in the community to reduce risk.

Why are we making the change?

This proposal would have reduced our attendance at AFA incidents by almost 60% in 2023-2024, or 19% of all incidents

This proposed change will bring us closer in line with other fire and rescue services, including North Wales and Mid and West Wales, as well as saving valuable time and resources, and reducing the impact on other factors, such as;

- Operational readiness (not being diverted away from real emergencies)
- The unnecessary risk to crews and public whilst responding
- Less disruption to our valuable community safety activities
- Less disruption to the training of operational personnel
- Improving environmental impact by removing unnecessary appliance mobilisations
- The financial drain on the Service.

What are the benefits of reducing false alarms?

- Each false alarm can lead people to become complacent when they hear a fire alarm
- There is a cost to you as a business from productive time lost
- SWFRS will not be diverted from other emergencies, training, and other prevention and protection work
- Reducing the number of blue light responses reduces risk on our roads.



The new model will allow us to achieve a significant reduction in the impact of unwanted fire signals, whilst ensuring that the most vulnerable in our communities continue to receive a timely response.

Further guidance

Our advice is to review your existing fire risk assessment and fire strategy/procedures to take account of this amendment and, where necessary, make any changes required to maintain effective fire safety arrangements.

Visit our website to gain further information and guidance on keeping your premises safe from fire and how to investigate fire alarms safely.

Further guidance is available on our [Business Fire Safety](#) page.

If you require further information or advice in relation to the change in our response to automatic fire alarm actuations from January 2025, then please email [**afaenquiries@southwales-fire.gov.uk**](mailto:afaenquiries@southwales-fire.gov.uk)

For specific guidance on eliminating unwanted fire alarm actuations, please refer to the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#)