



Memorandum

TO: PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE
AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT
COMMITTEE

FROM: Christopher M. Moore
Chief of Police

SUBJECT: Operations and Performance
Changes in the Police Department

DATE: November 15, 2011

Approved

Date

November 15, 2011

RECOMMENDATION

Accept this report on the Police Department's Operations and Performance Changes as they relate to a Verified Response for alarm calls.

BACKGROUND

As is the case with many law enforcement agencies throughout the nation, the San Jose Police Department has seen its staffing levels reduced substantially, necessitating the re-prioritization, modification, and elimination of certain police services.

As part of the FY 2011-2012 budget process, the Police Department (Department) identified numerous operational restructuring opportunities in service areas to realize additional efficiencies and to proactively prepare for staff reductions in the Police Department. Among the proposed service efficiencies to be evaluated were alarms.

The Department has long maintained the practice of responding to reports of audible alarms reported both by alarm companies and residents. As the number of installed residential alarms has grown throughout the years, the demand placed on police resources dedicated to alarm responses has grown commensurately. In 2010, the Department responded to over 16,000 audible alarm calls throughout the City in which 98.4% were determined to be false. It was the second largest percentile category of all call types.

With reduced staffing resources, the Department must ensure officers are available to respond to calls that prevent or reduce crime. The high volume of false alarms incurs a substantial cost associated with deploying officers to these calls. Therefore, the Department has studied best

practices with regard to alarm call response in order to ensure officers are available for dispatch to legitimate crimes in progress.

ANALYSIS

Currently, Department policy states that an officer must respond to all alarm calls. By following this practice, we are dispatching officers to calls where almost 99% have no indication of any criminal activity. The draw this creates on valuable resources associated with our current practice detracts from our ability to engage in meaningful enforcement and preventative activities. The primary purpose of police is to protect public safety and property through responses to reported crime, preventative patrols and community policing efforts. Our current methodology of responding to alarms fails to accomplish any of these goals. The Department researched this issue and found no conclusive independent studies that clearly establish any sort of deterrent effect when officers predictably respond to all reported alarms.

During our assessment of the Verified Response Procedure, we engaged other police agencies in discussion to gather their experiences as they moved to this methodology. What has become clear is the importance of communicating not only the reason for moving to a Verified Response Procedure, but also the need to educate the public as to the predicted outcomes associated to this operational change.

During a recent survey of law enforcement agencies across the nation, it was learned that many agencies no longer respond to alarms solely on the advice of alarm monitoring companies. Agencies such as Fremont PD, Salt Lake City PD, and Las Vegas PD have gone to a "Verified Response Procedure" which requires the existence of corroborating circumstances to trigger a police response to the report of an alarm. Other agencies that have adopted a Verified Response have experienced a dramatic reduction in the number of alarm responses. The Salt Lake City Police measured a 93% decrease when they adopted the procedure and did not experience a change in overall crime trends.

Agencies which have adopted the Verified Response Procedure require the existence of additional circumstances to "verify" that criminal activity is associated to the triggered alarm. This corroboration may come in the form of direct observations of a break-in by a witness, or other data such as audible/visible glass breakage gathered via on-site surveillance devices. A report published by Rana Sampson entitled, "*False Burglar Alarms*" cited Las Vegas and Salt Lake City as having the "best response" by requiring alarm companies to visually verify alarm legitimacy before calling the police.¹ In the case of unverified alarms, Communications would still make an advisory broadcast to units in the area who would exercise discretion to respond based on beat knowledge of the area. For example, a history of break-ins at a particular site

¹ Sampson, Rana (2002). "False Burglar Alarms." Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Series 5. Published by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).

would likely result in a response to an unverified alarm even under the Verified Response Procedure. Based on this information, the Department is proposing a revision to the Duty Manual, which would include the following amended procedures:

“When Communications receives a call of a burglary or perimeter alarm, the call-taker will obtain as much information as possible from the alarm monitoring company. He/she will determine if the alarm type is a “verified” in accordance with the guidelines enumerated in L1601, or is a panic, duress or robbery alarm. Alarms that involve any bank, credit unions, ATM’s, critical infrastructure, firearms dealers and explosives manufacturers/storage will be dispatched without the need for verification.”

This change will reduce the number of false alarm calls to which patrol officers are deployed, thus increasing their availability for proactive patrol time. In 2008, the Department conducted a study which found that \$662,203.52 is spent annually on false alarm activations not related to any crime. A review of last year’s statistics as well as national averages indicates this would be the typical finding in any year. Jon Sargent, Industry-Law Enforcement Liaison for the Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC) has told us there are approximately 100,000 alarms in the city of San Jose. Assuming this number is correct; this would indicate that two-thirds of the 276,598 households in San Jose are paying for a service that benefits only one-third of households. It is clear that a majority of our city’s population is paying for a service from which they will never derive any benefit.

Other agencies experienced concerns from the alarm industry when moving to a Verified Response Procedure. Alarm companies cited a potential loss of income from subscribers who opt out of monitoring services when a police officer is not guaranteed to respond. The Department’s current practice of responding to unverified alarm calls is part of a business model embraced by the alarm industry wherein they collect money from subscribers for police responses and offer no re-imbursement to the tax payers who actually pay for those costs.

Alarm companies will say that 80% of all false alarms are caused by 20% of careless alarm owners. Their intended conclusion is that we should focus on chronic false alarms and not punish responsible alarm owners. This claimed distribution of responsibility is simply inaccurate. Studies indicate that the responsibility for false alarms is far more equally shared. Salem, Oregon²; Arlington, Texas³; and Seattle, Washington⁴ found this claim to be untrue. Their statistics have shown that 60 – 80% of the alarm activations occurred at premises having one or two false alarms a year.

Another concern with Verified Response by the alarm companies is that crime may rise as a result. There is no conclusive evidence that this is true based on outcomes experienced by other cities after they had moved to a Verified Response Procedure. Based on the FBI Uniform Crime Report, in the first full year (2001) of Verified Response in Salt Lake City, they realized a minimal 1.8% burglary increase. The following year, there was a 12.1% increase in burglaries. Then in 2003, Salt Lake City burglaries decreased 6.4%. A long-range view of Salt Lake City

² Salem, Oregon Burglar Alarm Task Force (2003). “Report to Mayor and City Council.”

³ White, Jennifer. (2002). “False Alarm Paper to Arlington Mayor and City Council.”

⁴ Garnica, Detective Dale. (2004). “Percentage of alarms on first and second alarm signals.”

burglaries shows they have decreased by 32% from 1991 to 2003.⁵ No aspect of this trend dynamic can be definitively associated with the adoption of the Verified Response Procedure.

Burglaries in other Verified Response cities have appeared to be typical of the crime statistics, which are generally very cyclical in nature. Opponents of Verified Response will say that any burglary increase is due to police implementation of Verified Response style ordinance or policy. While the burglary rates in 2003 increased by 12% in Arvada, Colorado, which is a Verified Response city, Seattle experienced a 20% increase in residential burglaries during this period and was not a Verified Response city.⁶ In any study of this issue, it is evident that alarms do not produce any significant number of arrests. In 2002, Seattle PD responded to 24,505 alarms, of which 325 were valid alarms, and they arrested 46 suspects. The overwhelmingly disparate ratio of false alarms to actual break-ins meant the cost per arrested Seattle burglar was \$31,444.⁷ Yet San Jose's experiences illustrate an even more compelling example of how alarms fail to result in arrests. In 2010, only two arrests resulted from over 12,000 responses to alarms.

Alarm companies will offer alternatives to Verified Response such as "Two-Call Verification" or "Enhanced Call Verification". These models require the alarm companies to call a second responsible party to ascertain the validity of an alarm prior to requesting a response by police. These alternatives do not provide the efficiencies we are looking to achieve. We expect Verified Response to produce a significantly higher reduction in responses to false alarms.

It is evident that continuing a policy with the clear understanding that it produces desired results in less than 1% of the cases at a substantial draw on personnel resources, is simply not tenable in today's environment of reduced staffing levels. The Police Department must use its limited resources to address high priorities.

The Department recognizes this is a service delivery modification that will require department-wide training, continuous evaluation, and outreach to the community and the alarm industry. The Department is developing a community engagement strategy that will include media messaging and alarm company notification.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

No additional City Council action is needed.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST



Criterion 1: Requires Council action on the use of public funds equal to \$1 million or greater. **(Required: Website Posting)**

⁵ FBI Uniform Crime Report (1981, 2001, 2002 2003)

⁶ Heckman, Candace & Castro, Hector (2004). "Residential burglaries are up 20% in Seattle." Seattle PI.

⁷ Buck, A., Blackstone, E. Hakim, S. (2004) "Evaluation of Alternative Policies to Combat False Emergency Calls." Center for Competitive Government at Temple University, PA.

- ✓ **Criterion 2:** Adoption of a new or revised policy that may have implications for public health, safety, quality of life, or financial/economic vitality of the City. **(Required: E-mail and Website Posting)**
- ✓ **Criterion 3:** Consideration of proposed changes to service delivery, programs, staffing that may have impacts to community services and have been identified by staff, Council or a Community group that requires special outreach. **(Required: E-mail, Website Posting, Community Meetings, Notice in appropriate newspapers)**

This action meets the above Criteria 2 and 3, and will be posted on the City's website with agenda for the November 17, 2011 Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee meeting.

COST IMPLICATIONS/SUMMARY

The 2011-2012 Adopted Budget includes revenue for fines and associated penalties in the amount of \$452,000. Currently, on a calendar year basis, the first false alarm is responded to without charging the resident a fine. However, with the second and subsequent false alarm, residents are charged a fine for false alarms. Since the Police Department does not have any experience with the new service delivery model, the impact to the revenue for fines and associated penalty cannot be determined at this time. Therefore, the implementation of this new service delivery model as well as the associated revenue will be carefully reviewed and monitored during 2011-2012 and evaluated as part of the development of the 2012-2013 Proposed Operating Budget.

COORDINATION

This report was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office and the City Manager's Office.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP10-066 (e), Services that involve no physical changes to the environment.



CHRISTOPHER M. MOORE
Chief of Police

For questions please contact Lieutenant Chris Monahan, at 277-5200.

CMM: JDS/ adh

Attachment A: Duty Manual Revision/L 1600- L1606