

NO: **R073**

COUNCIL DATE: **April 22, 2013**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **April 15, 2013**

FROM: **Fire Chief**

FILE: **3900-20**

SUBJECT: **Amendments to Surrey Fire Service By-law, 1990, No. 10771 to Address False Alarms**

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire Services Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;
2. Approve amendments to Surrey Fire Service By-law, 1990, No. 10771 as documented in Appendix "A", which if adopted will allow for the Fire Services Department to use an "Order to Remedy Conditions" as a tool to address properties that generate false fire alarms at a rate higher than the City average and to recover the costs that are incurred in responding to false alarms from properties that generate more than 3 false alarms per year; and
3. Direct staff to bring forward the necessary amendment by-law for the required readings and adoption.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to obtain approval for amendments to Surrey Fire Service By-law, 1990, No. 10771 (the "Fire Service By-law") as documented in Appendix "A", which if adopted will allow for the use of "Order to Remedy Conditions" to address properties from which repeat false fire alarms are generated.

BACKGROUND

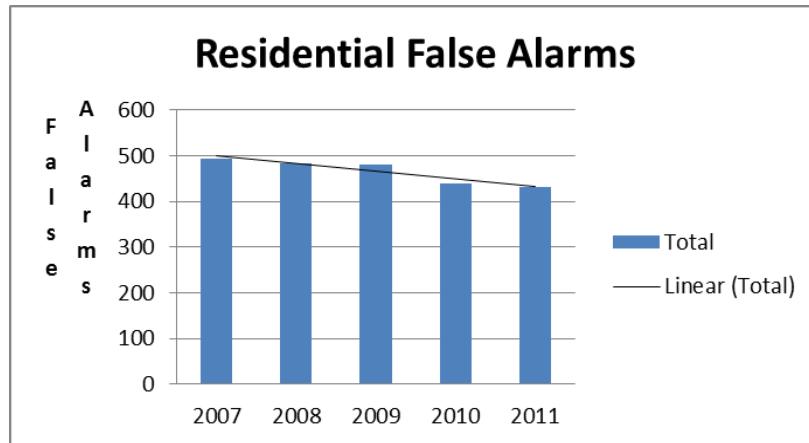
False fire alarms drain Fire Department resources and reduce the availability of Fire Services resources to respond to emergencies. Council adopted the Surrey Security and Fire Alarm By-law, 1997, No. 13168 (the "False Alarm By-law") in 1997, which acted to impose mandatory fees for each false fire alarm at a property at which the City Fire Services Department attends. In 2012 the Fire Service conducted a five year study to determine the effectiveness of the False Alarm By-law. Since the False Alarm By-law was first introduced it has been amended to include inflationary cost increases to the false alarm fees. The False Alarm By-law and the subsequent fee increases have had the intended effect of reducing the frequency of false fire alarms for single-family residential properties (see Chart 1); however, retrospective research indicates that there has not

been any significant impact on the number of false fire alarm calls generated by commercial properties and the multi-residential building sector (see Charts 2 and 3).

The Fire Service By-law allows the Fire Service under Section 29 “Order to Remedy Conditions” to recover costs in response to incidents; however, the Fire Service By-law does not specifically address response to automatic fire alarms. The proposed amendment will allow the Fire Chief to use the “Order to Remedy Conditions” for repeated Fire Service response to false fire alarms in any given building.

Due to the scale and risks associated with commercial and multi-residential buildings, the standard deployment response for alarms is a minimum of two fire apparatus compared to one fire apparatus response for an alarm from a single-family residential property. If action is taken to reduce the frequency of responses to false alarm calls from commercial and multi-residential buildings, the Fire Services Department would increase its availability to respond more expediently to emergencies.

Chart 1



Charts 2 and 3 show the history related to commercial and multi-residential properties for the same five-year period as Chart 1.

Chart 2

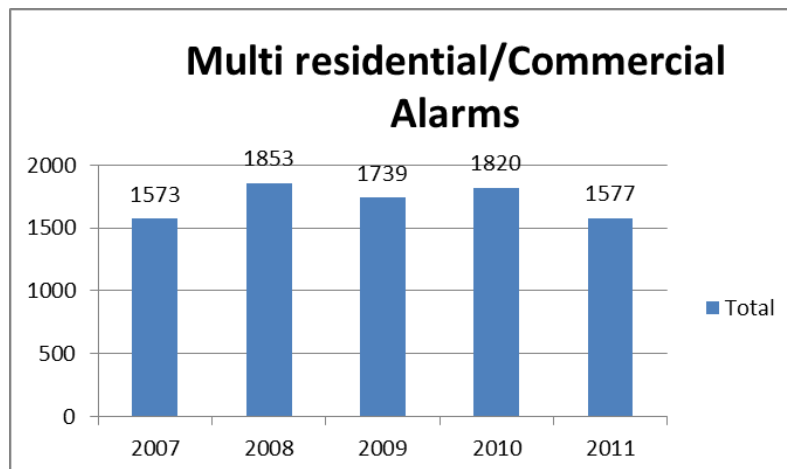
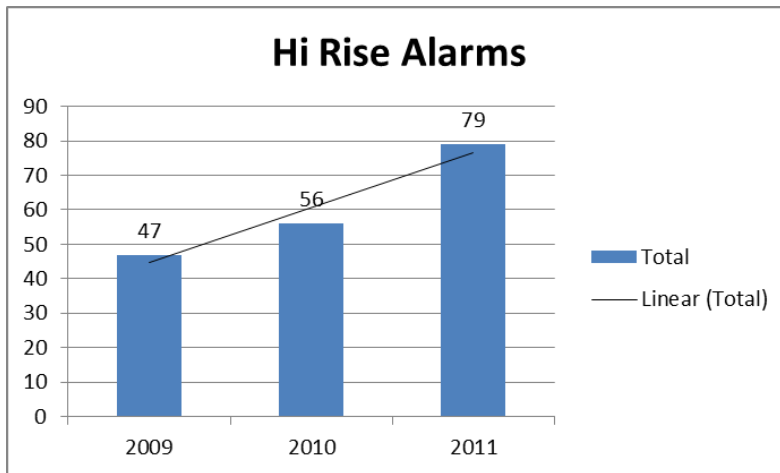


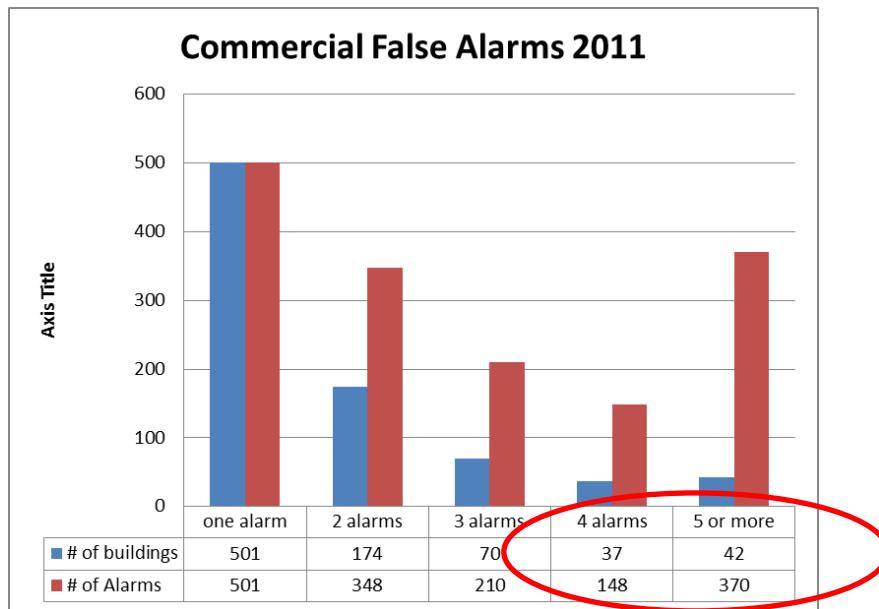
Chart 3



DISCUSSION

On average in Surrey, commercial properties have less than 2 false alarms per year. Chart 4 illustrates that 370 (23%) of the 1,577 commercial false alarms in 2011 were generated from 42 individual properties. In other words, 42 properties out of 828 separate commercial addresses in Surrey were responsible for over 700 responses of apparatus. These high generators of false alarms produced an average of 16 false alarms each in 2011.

Chart 4



Target Buildings – Chart 4 shows a small number of buildings cause a disproportionate amount of false alarms.

Appendix “A” documents amendments to the Fire Service By-law, which will provide the Fire Services Department with a means to encourage owners to take necessary actions to reduce the number of false alarms generated by problem properties. The amendments will introduce into the Fire Service By-law an “Order to Remedy Conditions” provision. Under this provision, the Fire Services Department personnel can issue such an Order, which will stipulate a timeframe and

a set of conditions with which the owner of the property must comply related to the repair/adjustment of their fire alarm system. The owner will be subject to additional cost recovery fees if they do not meet the Order. Further, if the owner is unwilling or unable to comply with the Order, the Fire Service By-law amendments will allow Fire Services personnel to enter the related property to effect repairs to the private system at the owner's expense. If the owner does not pay these expenses, the City will recover the expenses in the same manner as property taxes. The amendments will allow the Fire Services Department to recover costs on a full cost-recovery basis from any property that generates more than 3 false fire alarms per year as set by Fire Service policy.

The Fire Service By-law amendments as proposed will provide the Fire Services Department the ability to specifically focus and work with the owners of buildings/properties that have problematic fire alarm systems. Additionally, the amendment will assist the Fire Prevention Division to ensure that fire alarm systems are maintained properly. The expected reduction in calls for service will provide the Fire Services Department with more capacity to attend to real emergencies without the need to add equipment or manpower.

Legal Review:

Legal Services staff has reviewed this report and the proposed Fire Service By-law amendments and has no concerns.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed amendments to the Fire Service By-law will assist in achieving the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter; more particularly, the following scope action items in the Charter:

- SC11: Public Safety and Security; and
- EC14: Taxation Policies and Financial Incentives.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended the Council:

- Approve amendments to Surrey Fire Service By-law, 1990, No. 10771 as documented in Appendix "A", which if adopted will allow for the Fire Services Department to use an "Order to Remedy Conditions" to address properties that generate false fire alarms at a rate higher than the City average and to recover the costs that are incurred in responding to false alarms from properties that generate more than 3 false alarms per year; and
- Direct staff to bring forward the necessary amendment by-law for the required readings and adoption.



Len Garis
Fire Chief

LG/jg

Proposed Amendments to Surrey Fire Service By-law, 1990, No. 10771

Surrey Fire Service By-law, 1990, No. 10771, as amended, be further amended as follows:

1. By adding a new Section 26(f) immediately after existing Section 26(e) to read as follows:
 - (f) Where the Fire Chief or a member attends a property in response to a false alarm and an order has been previously made under Section 29(a.1) of this By-law in respect of that property, the property owners shall be liable to the City for all costs and expenses incurred by the City in attending the property. For the purposes of this By-law, “false alarm” shall have the same meaning as that term is defined in Surrey Security and Fire Alarm By-law, 1997, No. 13168, as amended.

2. By adding a new Section 29(a.1) immediately after existing Section 29(a) to read as follows:
 - (a.1) the owner or occupier repair an alarm system, and if the owner or occupier fails to repair the alarm system as required and within the time period set out in the order, the City may carry out or cause to be carried out the repairs at the cost of the owner or occupier;