

Verified Alarm Response

Discussion Document

August 16, 2005

The Problem

- The Dallas Police Department received almost 62,000 burglar alarm calls in 2004
- Of these calls, 97.2% (approximately 60,100) turned out to be false alarms
- Responding to these false alarms took approximately 47,000 police officer hours
 - Using DPDs calculation of 4.4 hours of active work per 8 hour shift, that is 41 police officer FTEs at a cost of approximately \$3.485 million in police time
- These statistics are not unusual, but are seen in police departments across the nation
 - “The vast majority of alarm calls – between 94 and 98 percent – are false (higher in some jurisdictions)” (U.S. Department of Justice)
 - False alarm dispatches are the single greatest waste of law enforcement resources in the U.S.
- 86% of the citizens and businesses without alarms are subsidizing alarm response for 14% who have alarms

The Problem (Cont.)

- Responding to false alarms takes police officers away from their primary job of fighting crime
- DPD and Special Collections are burdened with tracking false alarms, permits, billing, and the collections process
 - DPD Alarm Unit consists of 2 Sergeants, 4 Senior Corporals, 1 Office Assistant, costing approximately \$500,000
 - Special Collections has 3.6 FTEs for false alarm billing and collections, costing approximately \$180,000

What Other Cities Have Done

- Salt Lake City adopted verified response in 2000
 - Ordinance 5.08.095 “False Alarms: Except for alarms at a wholesale or retail firearms business, intrusion alarm response shall be dispatched by the police department only after a private guard responder has confirmed that an attempted or actual crime has occurred at the alarm site.”
 - Experienced immediate 88% reduction in the number of alarm calls; by 2004, alarm calls were down by 94%
 - Prior to verified response, the average response time to alarm calls was 45 minutes, ranging up to 3 hours
 - Response time from private guard company is 17 minutes
 - Response time to high priority calls has decreased from five minutes to three minutes, a 40% reduction
 - Burglaries went up 1.8% the first year, up 12% the second year, down 6.4% the third year, and are down 11% for the first half of this year (similar to past cyclical trends)
 - Alarm companies charge an extra \$5 - \$7 per month for response to alarms; minimal complaints received

What Other Cities Have Done (Cont.)

- Las Vegas adopted verified response in 1991
 - Dispatches on burglary alarms dropped from over 100,000 per year to less than 10,000 per year, a 90% reduction, despite large population growth
 - Burglary rates declined by 8 percent for the three years following the change in policy
- Los Angeles recently contemplated verified response
 - Discovered that a private guard response could provide quicker response
 - Further, in the rare instance that an actual crime is detected, the combined response between private guard and police would be faster than police response alone, due to the reduced priority given alarm calls by police (“Verified Response Really Does Work”)

What Other Cities Are Doing

- Approximately 24 cities have successfully implemented verified response, including: (populations noted)

Las Vegas, NV (1 million)

Salt Lake City, UT (184,000)

Lane County, CO (300,000)

Henderson, NV (145,000)

Winnipeg, Canada (647,600)

Milwaukee, WI (629,296)

Aurora, CO (222,103)

Fremont, CA (206,856)

Conclusions

- Attempts to manage false alarms with warnings, fines and permits has limited effectiveness
- The Dallas Police Department responds to alarm calls which are false over 97% of the time
- Continuing to waste police resources is not in the best interest of public safety
- Dallas ranks 1st among the nation's big cities in crime

It is time to free up 45 officers to do what they do best

The Solution

- Verified response
 - Police do not respond to a burglar alarm signal
 - Police will be dispatched after being contacted by alarm companies that have visually verified that a crime has or is occurring
 - Alarm companies may use their own resources or private guard responders to verify
 - Police Department continues responding to the human activated alarms, such as hold-ups, panic, and duress

Compliance with State Bill 568

- Recently passed state bill
- Allows no police response to a burglar alarm signal if:
 - A reasonable effort is made to notify permit holders of intention to adopt the ordinance; and
 - A public hearing is conducted which gives persons interested in the response of the municipality to alarm systems the opportunity to be heard
- The plan to comply with this bill includes:
 - Verified response for all burglar alarm calls (commercial and residential)
 - Dallas Police response to human activated alarms, such as hold-ups, panic, and duress (commercial and residential)
 - Assess fines for every false hold-up, panic, or duress call (no “freebies”)
 - Residential: \$100 per response
 - Commercial: \$100 for first, \$200 for second, \$300 for third, \$400 for fourth and beyond
 - Continue issuing permits and charging permit fees for commercial sites
 - Increase fee to \$100
 - Discontinue permit fees for residential
 - Would continue to register annually, but with no fee

Benefits for Citizens

- Reduced response time to alarm calls from private guards
- Reduced response time to actual police service needs
- More personal service from private guards
- No longer pay for residential permit
- Revised fee structure is slanted towards the business community since a large portion of false alarms are commercial
- 86% of the citizens and businesses without alarms are no longer subsidizing alarm response

Benefits for City

- Allow police officers to focus on true crime rather than wasting time responding to false alarms
- Improve morale of police officers
- Redeploy officers from Alarm Unit to needed areas
- Redeploy administrative resources by no longer charging a fee, tracking, and renewing residential alarm permits or billing and collecting for excessive residential false alarms
- Reduce call volume for dispatchers
- Collect fines for every false panic, duress, or hold-up call (no “freebies”) – both residential and commercial
- More severe penalties for those who abuse the system

Monetary Benefits

Description	Inputs	Benefit
Eliminate DPD officer time spent responding false alarms, allowing them to focus on true crime	41 FTEs x \$85,000 annual all-inclusive cost	\$3,485,000
Redeploy partial resources in DPD Alarm Unit (Today: 2 Sergeants, 4 Senior Corporals, 1 Office Assistant)	4 FTEs x \$85,000 annual all-inclusive cost	\$340,000
Redeploy partial resources in Special Collections for false alarm billing and collections (Today: 3.6 FTEs)	2.6 FTEs x \$50,000 annual all-inclusive cost	\$130,000
Personnel costs of call-takers and dispatchers	TBD	TBD
TOTAL		\$3,955,000 +

Revenue Impacts

Current Policy

Alarm permit fees	\$3,757,750
Excessive false alarm service fines	\$82,921
Total	<u>\$3,840,671</u>

Proposed Policy Estimates

Alarm permit fees (commercial only)	\$1,482,400
Fines for false panic, duress, or hold-up calls (residential)	\$249,700
Fines for false panic, duress, or hold-up calls (commercial, including escalation for repeat offenders)	\$730,198
Total	<u>\$2,462,298</u>

Estimated Net Revenue Loss **(\$1,378,373)**

Bottom Line

- Enabling 45 Dallas Police Officers to focus on their primary job of reducing true crime for under \$1.4 million is a tremendously efficient use of tax payer money

Obstacles to Overcome

- Alarm companies and their lobbyists have fought and will continue to fight any changes to the current arrangement
- Members of the North Texas Alarm Association appeared before the Texas House of Representatives Law Enforcement Committee in August 2004 to propose “Mandated Police Alarm Response”
- Some cities that have considered verified response have backed off due to political pressure on the city council from the alarm industry and the lobbyists they hired
- “When confronted with verified response, the alarm industry will send letters to alarm users in the community using emotional scare tactics and inflammatory statements. This has been the alarm industry modus operandi throughout the nation.” (“Verified Response Really Does Work”)
- Misguided public perception that not responding to alarms will increase crime

Path Forward

- Educate and gain support
 - Council Members
 - Dallas Police Department Leadership
 - City Management
 - Police Associations
 - Media
 - Citizens

Questions?

