

False Alarm Cost Recovery

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

Jun 19, 2018



Issue Identification in Santa Barbara County

- Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office (SBCSO) regularly responds to false alarm activations throughout the County for residential and commercial owners of alarm systems.
- Alarm activations are responded to by SBCSO Deputies.
- Most responses by Deputies are the result of false alarms, with no crime committed.
- SBCSO has no effective way to recoup the cost of resources spent on false alarms response.



Response Statistics

- The Sheriff's office responded to 5,599 alarm activations during 2016 in which 3,271 were responded to by on duty patrol, who determined that only 32 cases were legitimate enough to have reports written.
 - In 2017, that number grew to 6,124 in which 3,770 were responded to by a deputy with 35 reports, less than 1% of responses being written up in a report.
 - In 2016, 105 alarm activations responded to by the Sheriff's department were at the same 5 addresses. Patrol Deputies responded to 30 calls, 15 of which were found to be accidental activations.
-



“Verified Response”

- “Verified Response” – protocol used by departments which utilizes alarm features or physical confirmation to ensure that alarm activation is non-accidental.
 - Verification of a triggered alarm can be made by a property owner, alarm company agent, or by an audio or visual feature on an alarm system.
 - Deputies respond to alarms “verified” through one of the aforementioned methods.
 - Audio or visual features for verification purposes could result in potential cost to owners of alarm systems due to the need to upgrade current systems with these features.
-



Alarm Fee Ordinance

- Jurisdictions may require registration of alarm systems with the Sheriff's Department and accompanying fees for false alarm activation through an Alarm Fee Ordinance.
- Registration fees and false alarm activation fees may act as cost recovery for resources expended on false alarm response by deputies.
- The cities of Santa Maria and Santa Barbara have implemented alarm permitting ordinances that require annual renewal. Santa Barbara and Santa Maria require a \$40 and \$13.70 fee for alarm registration, respectively.
- Alarm fees are waived for the first two offences of registered users, otherwise fees of \$55 for the first 3 accidental alarm activations, \$100 for the 4th, and \$250 for any thereafter.



Costs

- The implementation of alarm fees and/or a “verified response” system can result in additional costs for The Sheriff’s Office or owners of alarm systems.
- A determination needs to be made if one or all of these programs would result in effective cost recovery for the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office or result in additional expenses and to examine other options for recouping costs associated with false alarm response.



Recommended Action

- Board direction to staff to work with the Sheriff's Office and other involved departments to develop cost recovery options association with law enforcement response to false alarm calls including the feasibility of an alarm permit ordinance, alarm permitting fees, and "verified response" implementation.

