

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS about the ALARM ORDINANCE, ALARM REGISTRATION AND FALSE ALARM FEES

Is there a value to owning an alarm system?

Yes, an alarm system can bring you a sense of security and peace of mind and is effective with proper installation, adequate training and regular maintenance.

Are false alarms a problem?

Yes they are. Across the nation, the growth of alarm system ownership has resulted in a tremendous amount of false alarms. The response to false alarms has created an additional burden on our law enforcement agencies. Nationwide, approximately 98% or more of all the burglar alarms police respond to are false.

False alarms divert deputies from places where they're genuinely needed. They can delay responses to calls that may be real and can remove our deputies from proactive crime prevention activities.

Why did the County adopt a false alarm ordinance?

The County is handling more than 8,000 false alarm calls a year. If the Sheriff's Department continued with the same alarm response policy over the next three years, deputies would respond to over 24,000 alarm calls, of which more than 98% are false. This is very costly to all the County taxpayers.

Many jurisdictions across the nation have also adopted false alarm ordinances and permitting or registration as a way to reduce their false alarms.

What does the County hope to accomplish by enforcing the false alarm ordinance?

The County wants to substantially reduce the number of false alarms that the Sheriff's Department handles. Results from other cities and counties that hold the alarm user accountable for the maintenance and operation of their alarm systems have successfully reduced the number of false alarm calls.

The alarm ordinance is based on an alarm model that was developed by the national alarm industry in conjunction with the National Sheriff's Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. The Sheriff's Department developed the ordinance with the assistance of the local alarm industry.

If I have just one or two false alarms a year is that a problem?

As an individual alarm user, if the Pierce County Sheriff's Department responds to your home or business just once or twice a year on a false alarm, it doesn't seem like a major problem, but it is. The use of our deputies has a value attached to it. We all count on our Sheriff's Department to be there when we need them. If every alarm user believed that it is okay to just have a few false alarms each year, then that would result in thousands of additional unnecessary calls for our Sheriff's Department. That is a burden placed on all taxpayers in the County.

Who is required to have an alarm registration?

Anyone operating an alarm system in unincorporated Pierce County whether monitored or unmonitored is required to obtain an alarm registration. A separate alarm registration is required for each alarm site having a distinct address or business. Alarm Systems **not required** to obtain a registration include those installed on an auto, on one's person or an alarm system which will not emit a signal either audible or visible from the outside of the building or residence but is designed solely to alert the occupants of a building or residence.

How do I register my alarm?

The ordinance requires alarm companies to provide the Alarm Administrator with a list of all their existing alarm users within the unincorporated Pierce County limits. You will then be notified by mail to register your alarm. New alarm systems are required to have a valid alarm registration within 30 days of the installation or activation. Alarm companies are required to notify the Alarm Administrator within 10 days of all newly installed alarm systems. You can also access an online site to download alarm registration forms or renewal online. www.atbservices.com/piercecounty

What is the cost of an annual alarm registration?

The cost of an alarm registration or its renewal is \$24 for either a residential or a commercial alarm site. For residential sites only, a Senior Citizen annual registration or renewal fee of \$12 is available. To qualify for the Senior Citizen fee the applicants must be 65 years or older, provide proof of age, be listed as the property owner or lessee and must have the alarm agreement in their name.

An alarm owner with a permanent disability is also offered the same discount as a Senior Citizen. Call 1- 800-861-5944 for qualifying requirements.

No refund of a registration or registration renewal fee will be made.

What about the green permit stickers that Pierce County has issued in the past; will I be receiving a sticker when I register?

No. Pierce County is no longer issuing “permit” stickers for alarm sites. Once the previous alarm ordinance ended, Pierce County went to a **“registration”** process that does not include issuing stickers.

If I plan to cancel my alarm service in the next couple of months do I still need to register my alarm?

If your alarm service will not be cancelled within thirty days of receiving the notice to register your alarm system, then you are required to have a valid alarm registration to operate your alarm system.

Where do all the registration fees and alarm service fees go?

All monies generated from the ordinance are dedicated to the Sheriff’s Department to cover the cost of administrating the alarm program and to recover some of the cost of the Sheriff’s services lost to false alarm response. There is no “profit” for the County.

Why registration fees and annual renewals?

Registration fees pay for the administration of the alarm program. The alarm program structure that is established to educate alarm users about reducing false alarms, tracking false alarm calls, billing alarm service fees, providing online services and the availability to answer your questions via a phone call is an on going yearly function. Whether or not you have a false alarm this service function is necessary for all alarm users. Pierce County has approximately 17,000 alarm sites to track and 170 alarm companies and monitoring centers that they must coordinate and interact with on alarms.

The ordinance requires Enhanced Call Verification (ECV), what’s that?

The alarm industry developed Enhanced Call Verification (ECV) as an effective way to avoid sending law enforcement to a false alarm. It requires that your alarm company make at least two separate calls in verifying your alarm systems activation signal prior to contacting the Sheriff. Your alarm company will first call your home or business where your alarm is occurring and if they fail to contact a responsible party they will then call a

second number that you have provided them such as a cell phone number. The whole process usually takes less than 60 to 90 seconds.

As the alarm user, you are familiar with any type of activity occurring at the alarm site such as guests, home repairs, cleaning crews, real estate agents, employees opening or closing times etc. This gives you two or more opportunities to cancel accidental alarm activations before requesting a Sheriff's response.

Many alarm companies and monitoring centers have voluntarily implemented ECV on their own since it has proven to reduce false alarms and help their customers avoid false alarm fees. You can contact your alarm company to request ECV and add provide additional contact phone numbers for responsible parties.

(ECV PROCEDURE IS FOR BURGLAR ALARMS ONLY – NOT ROBBERY, PANIC, MEDICAL OR FIRE)

The ordinance requires “Verified Response” procedures for my monitoring company to follow on all burglar alarm calls. What does that involve?

These procedures further reduce the potential number of false alarm calls that an alarm user can incur. Your monitoring company will only request a burglar alarm dispatch on alarm signals that meet one of the following criteria:

- A person at the alarm site confirms the need for a law enforcement response
- A crime-in-progress is confirmed by the use of audio or live-time video
- All newly installed alarm systems with a CP-01 control panel must have two independent zones activate such as an exterior perimeter and an interior zone
- Non- CP-01 panel, at least two alarm signals during the same alarm event period of ten minutes

Alarm users can have their alarm company resurvey their alarm systems to evaluate the alarm system configuration to generate a confirmed alarm signal.

What is the fee amount for a false alarm?

The false alarm fee in the prior ordinance was set at \$250 residential and \$250 commercial, the new fee for a false burglar/intrusion alarm is \$100 and the robbery/panic false alarm fee is \$200.

Can my alarm monitoring center cancel a burglar/intrusion alarm that they have called into the communications center?

Yes they can. You will not be charged for a false alarm if the cancellation notice is received prior to the deputy's arrival at the alarm site. Only your alarm monitoring center can cancel an alarm burglar/intrusion call. DO NOT CALL 911 to cancel your alarm, call your alarm monitoring company.

Can my alarm registration be suspended?

Yes it can be suspended along with Sheriff's response. Several of the reasons for suspension are failure to keep a valid alarm registration, failure to pay false alarm fees or excessive false alarms within your registration period. Sheriff's response will be suspended after the third false burglar/intrusion alarm within your registration period. An alarm user will be provided a thirty (30) day period to be reinstated prior to the actual suspension.

How is my alarm company involved in this matter?

Your alarm company plays a very important role in helping to reduce false alarms. They are there to assist you with any questions you may have about your alarm system's operation and its maintenance. To prevent having any false alarms, check with your alarm company for suggestions on how to avoid the most common alarm user errors or go to our link at www.atbservices.com/piercecounty.

Why was ATB Services contracted to administer the alarm program?

ATB Services is a national professional service company which provides a comprehensive service to exclusively administer alarm programs for other cities and counties nationwide. Rarely is it cost effective for a community to create and maintain their own system of tracking and billing false alarm violations, as it requires new computer software, hiring and training additional administrative staff.

ATB Services leverages their expertise, systems, people and processes to administer false alarm programs for many jurisdictions, thus spreading the infrastructure cost to make it affordable for all communities.

Pierce County must track more than 8,000 false alarm calls a year, coordinate and interact with 170 alarm installation and monitoring centers both in state and out of state. The County has an estimated 17,000 or more alarm users to register, track their alarm calls, billings, suspensions and reinstatements. The Alarm Administrator will also provide an on-line alarm users school, on-line access for alarm users, alarm companies and County officials.

What is the effective date for the ordinance?

The Pierce County Council passed the ordinance on November 27, 2007. The requirements in the ordinance became effective on January 1, 2008.

Where can I read or obtain a copy of the ordinance?

The alarm ordinance is posted online at www.atbservices.com/piercecounty or call 1-800-861-5944.

Where can I learn more about the ordinance and how to reduce false alarms?

A free online alarm school is available at www.atbservices.com/piercecounty . Everyone who will use your alarm system is encouraged to take the 15 to 20 minute online class.

Who can I call if I have additional questions or comments?

Call 1-800-861-5944, Monday through Friday, 7 am – 4 pm Pacific Standard Time.