



November 2011 Tip of the Month



False Alarms

Fines for false alarms generate more than \$1 million a year in Hillsborough County

False Alarm Ordinance

In 2003, Hillsborough County Sheriff's deputies responded to more than 60,000 false alarm calls. Records show 97 percent of alarms are false.

In 2004, the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners approved burglary/security alarm Ordinance 04-16 that's meant to reduce the number of false alarms in our community.

The goal of the ordinance is to prevent false alarms, allowing Law Enforcement to focus on actual emergencies.

Q. What is a false alarm?

- A false alarm is the activation of an alarm system, which results in a response by a law enforcement agency where an emergency does not exist as determined by law enforcement.
- False alarms include signals activated intentionally in non-emergency situations and alarms for which the actual cause is unknown.
- False alarms include alarms caused by conditions of nature that are normal for the area, including but not limited to rain, wind and lightning.

Q. What is the fine for a false alarm?

Security system owners will be fined for repeated false alarms that occur within a one year period as follows:

- 1st and 2nd occurrence—warning notice
- 3rd occurrence—\$75 fine
- 4th occurrence—\$100 fine
- 5th occurrence—\$150 fine
- 6th occurrence—\$300 fine
- 7th occurrence and above—\$500 fine per incident

Q. How do I appeal a false alarm?

- A burglar alarm user has 10 business days from the date of issuance of the written false alarm notice to submit a written appeal to the Alarm Administrator.

- The alarm administrator has the authority to dismiss or enforce a violation as outlined in Section 11 of Ordinance 04-16.

Facts you need to know

- The owner will be required to appear before the Special Magistrate if they fail to pay the false alarm fine after the appeal period.
- The Special Magistrate can assess a per day fine until the false alarm fine is paid.
- The Special Magistrate may record a lien against the owner's property to enforce the fine.
- If the Sheriff's Office receives an alarm call and the alarm is false, the property owner would be charged a fine, even if the alarm company cancels the alarm.

Prevent false alarms

- Use care when entering your code into the keypad.
- Make sure everyone with a key to your home or business knows how to operate the security system, including houseguests, temporary employees, maintenance workers and cleaning staff.
- Close and lock all doors and windows tightly.
- Keep pets, balloons, fans and space heaters away from motion sensor areas.
- Fans, heaters, air conditioners and open windows can create drafts that may set off motion sensor alarms.
- Regularly clean insects and spider webs away from sensors.
- Wait a few moments after activating the system to ensure the security system is armed properly.
- Enter and exit before delay times expire.
- Call the alarm company if you are doing any remodeling, installing new phone systems, or fumigating.
- Have the alarm system checked each year.



[Hillsborough County False Alarm Ordinance](http://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/hcce)