



ACT
Government



Automatic Fire Alarms – Fees and Charges

Disallowable instrument, DI2023-104. Commences 1 July 2023.

A.C.T Government Advice

A range of government fees and charges have increased for 2023-24. New fee determinations for Automatic Fire Alarms for 2023/24 are summarised below.

Automatic Fire Alarms

ACT Fire & Rescue (ACTF&R) is committed to reducing the number of unwanted false alarms from Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems. Unwanted alarms are when ACTF&R has attended in response to an alarm where there is no fire or other emergency. ACTF&R has a statutory obligation under the Emergencies Act 2004 to attend to all fire alarms.

Unwanted alarms create complacency towards genuine alarms which can result in serious injury or loss of life. They also divert ACTF&R resources that would otherwise be available for genuine emergencies.

AFA systems are a crucial component in fire detection for buildings and are designed to alert occupants and initiate quick responses by ACTF&R in the case of fires. AFA systems are required under building legislation, as prescribed by the National Construction Code (NCC) and the Building Code of Australia (BCA).

It is important that building owners and managers properly manage and maintain their AFA systems to ensure their correct operation and to reduce the likelihood of unwanted alarms.

The AFA systems that require monitoring must be connected to an approved Automatic Fire Alarm Network Provider (AFANP).

Charges for false alarms

The Emergencies Act 2004 Section 201 (Determination of fees) allows ACTF&R to charge for attending false alarm callouts to monitored AFA systems. This charge is intended to motivate building owners and managers to be continually proactive in managing their AFA systems and to ensure that they are properly maintained. It has been demonstrated that properly maintained systems assist in reducing the number of false alarms attended by ACTF&R allowing them to respond more readily to genuine emergencies.

From 1 July 2023 the false alarm charges will be as follows:

Disallowable instrument, DI2023-196. [Emergencies \(Fees\) Determination 2023 | Disallowable instruments \(act.gov.au\)](#)

- Item 289 (c) - Residential building, false alarm fee **\$305.00**
- Item 291 (f) - Commercial / other non-residential building, false alarm fee **\$1522.00**

In certain circumstances, such as storm events and other natural disasters, false alarms may not be charged if the alarm activation was beyond the control of the owner.

There are additional circumstances (leniencies) resulting in no charge, including:

- The first false alarm after a 60-day period of no alarm activity at a site, will not be charged. Subsequent false alarms which occur within 60 days of that first alarm will be charged.
- A fee is not payable for a false alarm where, in the sole opinion of the Chief Officer, the alarm:
 - i. could not have been prevented by reasonable maintenance of the alarm system, or
 - ii. was activated by a circumstance beyond the reasonable control of the "owner" as defined in the Emergencies Act 2004
<https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2004-28/>

Billing of charges

Building owners or managers are responsible and accountable for the payment of false alarm charges resulting from unwanted false alarms. ACTF&R invoices AFANPs and they, in turn, invoice building owners or managers.

ACTF&R is not involved where owners forward false alarm costs on to a third party, such as hotel guests when the activation resulted from normal occupant activities such as cooking and showering.

Main causes of false alarms

Smoke detectors are extremely sensitive. Steam from showers, smoke from burning food, dust and aerosols such as deodorant/ hair/ insect spray etc. can activate them.

The most common causes are:

- Poor building maintenance
- AFA system malfunctions
- Contractors (construction/ maintenance/ cleaners etc)
- Burnt food (toast etc)
- Cooking fumes
- Steam (showers/ cleaning etc)
- Aerosols sprays (deodorant/ hairspray etc)
- Cigarettes / candles / vaping
- Dirty smoke detectors (dust/ cobwebs etc)
- 'Break Glass' alarm damage or misuse

Avoiding false alarms

For building owners or managers:

- The primary cause of false alarms is poorly maintained fire systems. 'A proper maintenance standard' is required pursuant to the '*Emergencies ACT 2004*' & '*AS:1851- Routine service of fire protection systems and equipment*'.
- In some circumstances a change of detector type, sensitivity or location may also reduce unwanted alarm activations. There are several specialist companies who can provide advice on options. ACTF&R Fire Safety section may also be contacted for advice.

- Implementation of well-regulated protocols can also be effective in reducing false alarms. For example:
 - Contractors carrying out building or maintenance work should be inducted into the workplace with building owners/managers ensuring appropriate temporary isolation of AFA systems where required.
 - Building owners/managers should be aware of which detectors on their property will activate a brigade response and which will not. If not, they should source this information from their alarm service provider. New or temporary residents should then be given the same information, during their induction.
 - Clear protocols must be set for residents to avoid false alarms.
E.g. If a stand-alone alarm inside a unit is activated by cooking fumes, occupants must be clearly warned not to open their front door to ventilate, if doing so will likely set off a monitored detector in the hallway or common area.
Ventilation via external windows, doors or ducting should avoid an unwanted false alarm.

For occupants, tenants or guests:

- Avoid the use of smoking materials or vaping in close vicinity to detectors.
- Avoid using aerosols sprays (deodorant/ hairspray etc) in close vicinity to detectors.
- Before cooking or showering, activate exhaust fans and where possible, open vents or windows.

For contractors, cleaners, or maintenance staff:

- Ensure building owners/ managers are aware of any work being carried out in the vicinity of detectors, and that appropriate isolation of AFA systems are implemented where required.
- Avoid activities that may damage or disrupt smoke detectors. For example: moving, altering or interfering with detectors. Steam cleaning, fumigations or activities that create dust etc


Request for non-payment of false alarm fee

Requests for Non-Payment of False Alarm Fees must be applied for by the Automatic Fire Alarm Network Provider (AFANP), on behalf of their client. Applications may be lodged with ACTF&R seeking the Chief Officer's consideration and decision under provisions of the instrument. The application must be made, not more than 180 calendar days from the A.C.T Government invoice date and in line with ACTF&R policy AP-07.

<https://esa.act.gov.au/cbr-be-emergency-ready/fire-safety>

ACTF&R officers attending incidents do not have authority to waive or review AFA false alarm charges. The review of AFA false alarm charges is at the discretion of the Chief Officer ACTF&R. For billing enquiries regarding Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) charges, please contact your Automatic Fire Alarm Network Provider (AFANP).

Authorised delegate of ACT Fire & Rescue

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Gregory Mason | Ag Chief Officer | ACT Fire & Rescue