

Investigating false fire alarms as they happen

Research by a multi-agency partnership into the causes and frequency of false alarms from fire alarm systems in buildings, will lead to the development of proposed solutions to prevent their recurrence.

Firefighters throughout the UK are frequently called to false alarms from fire detection and suppression systems, usually installed in commercial premises and often monitored remotely. They cost businesses and Fire and Rescue Services an estimated £1 billion per year, with each false alarm costing businesses around £2,900, and Fire and Rescue Service around £300.

Starting this month, BRE Global will team up with partners from the Association of British Insurers (ABI), British Approvals for Fire Equipment (BAFE), the CBRE Group, CS Todd & Associates Ltd, the Fire Industry Association (FIA), Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), to undertake ground breaking new research.

Two SFRS Watch Managers, seconded from Glasgow's group of Fire Safety Enforcement Officers, will work alongside a fire alarm industry expert to gather live intelligence on incidents involving the actuation of fire alarm systems. In this regard the project is unique, as previous studies have involved the use of historical data.

"False alarms are a problem worldwide and this revolutionary new approach aims to gather reliable data on their real causes," said Raman Chagger, Principal Consultant at BRE Global. "Our partners bring different expertise and, coming from varied backgrounds, give this collaborative project a solid foundation from which to achieve a common goal – reducing false alarms."

The project aims to:

- Collate comprehensive data on unwanted false alarm incidents
- Identify and classify the common causes of unwanted false alarms
- Improve engagement by the SFRS, the fire industry and businesses on unwanted false alarms
- Reduce the volume of unwanted false alarms in the Glasgow City area.
- Provide intelligence to help reduce the volume of unwanted false alarms across Scotland.

"Unwanted false alarm signals are a significant issue for Fire and Rescue Services," says Lewis Ramsay, Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) and SFRS Director of Prevention and Protection, said so it's important we join with our partners to see them reduced. By working together we can gather information on the common causes of false alarms and identify approaches to reduce the number that occur."

In addition to researching false alarms, the project will promote the benefits of having automatic fire alarm systems installed in buildings by studying fires where systems have responded appropriately.

As fire alarm systems are so widely applied, the outcomes of this work have the potential to impact across Europe as well as in the UK. This includes possibly influencing future standards and codes of practice in respect of automatic fire alarm systems.

This work builds on that from a previous study undertaken by the BRE Global. The report from that study, entitled "*The causes of false fire alarms in buildings*", is freely available at <http://www.bre.co.uk/podpage.jsp?id=1752>