



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

July 2016

Unwanted alarms, revisited:

A couple of years ago I wrote a series of articles about reducing false and unwanted alarms. This series looked at reduction efforts during the plan review process, eliminating unnecessary devices and follow up of existing system activations. For anyone involved in this endeavor it is quite time consuming and seems to produce minimal results. So, what more can be done?

For the last four or five years a number of organizations, including the NFPA and IAFC joined with USFA and the alarm industry experts to look at ways to reduce these responses that drain resources and place the public and responders at an undue risk. There have been some changes proposed in the codes and standards, and a few have made it through the voting process. But, the changes don't take affect overnight, if at all. For the

changes that were approved in the newer codes and standards to be enforceable, these same codes and standards must be adopted by the state or municipality. This code change process may take six to nine years at the minimum to be enforced, at best. Other cities or towns have adopted their own amendments to the codes, or have written their own local ordinance to address their specific concerns.

Recently, the NFPA held a session at the 2016 Conference & Expo that featured a panel discussion entitled 'What's going on with unwanted alarms?' This panel included staff and experts from many disciplines that all are working towards the common goal. Click [here](#) for a summary of this session and additional links to other studies and meetings.

But, are we making progress in student housing?

- When an alarm sounds in student housing do the occupants evacuate?
 - On-campus housing the answer is likely – yes. Mostly, because they have to in according with university policy.
 - Off-campus housing this is not as likely. However, newer buildings with mini-horns or sounders in the individual apartments are excellent for causing evacuation.
- New student housing is rising up all across the country. How are these buildings protected?
 - Are there fire detection systems?
 - Are these being designed, installed and inspected properly?



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- How about educational efforts?
 - Are we having success in reducing or preventing fires?
 - Are the tenants cooking smarter, thus preventing alarm activations?

If not, we need to keep working on the solutions. Join in some of the national discussions to see what others are trying to reduce the overall risk. The Center also has several committees that track code proposals, code and product development. If you have ideas for these committees please send them to me, and I'll forward your ideas to the committee chair.

Overall, there isn't an easy answer to address the false alarm problem. By working together with the alarm industry, code and standard organizations, AHJ's, fire service, building owners and occupants we can definitely identify

some ideas to make a difference.

Tim Knisely

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In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.

Tim has been active with The Center for Campus Fire Safety since its inception and served as treasurer from 2007 to 2010.

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