



**City of Charlottesville
Fire Department**

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Charlottesville Fire Department Implements New Response Policy to Fire Alarm Activations

Starting November 1st, the Charlottesville Fire Department (CFD) will begin operating under a new policy regarding the way it responds to automatic fire alarm activations occurring within the City of Charlottesville and at the University of Virginia. This policy change is driven by study and analysis (P3) of the department's previous practice of having multiple emergency vehicles responding to these types of alarms. A study of these alarm incidents revealed that the fire department was responding to a high rate of alarm activation occurrences but less than 1% of these incidents actually involved hazardous or emergency conditions upon the fire department's arrival. The new alarm activation response policy will aim to (1) minimize the draw down impact on fire department resources assigned to the high rate of alarm activation incidents, (2) reduce the accident risks posed to motorists, pedestrians, and fire department personnel associated with emergency vehicles responding to alarm activations, and (3) reduce the costs of wear and tear on fire apparatus and the fuel usage costs associated with the old response policy.

Nationally it has been documented that the leading threats to the safety of firefighters are traffic hazards encountered en route to and returning from emergencies. Emergency vehicles are involved in about 13,500 incidents on the nation's roadways each year, according to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration. One-third of the approximately 100 annual firefighter deaths occur while personnel are responding to or returning from emergencies, according to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

In addition to the deaths of public-safety personnel, 126 civilian motorists nationwide died between 2005 and 2009 in incidents involving emergency vehicles on which emergency lights were being used, according to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration.

THE NEW POLICY

After study and analysis the Charlottesville Fire Department will change its policy to automatic fire alarms in the City by reducing the number of fire apparatus units by 50% (from 2 to 1). If more information is received as to a potential hazard while fire units are en route, the response will be upgraded to a full response.

The Charlottesville Fire Department responds to approximately 1,000 automatic fire alarms annually in the City. Not only will this new policy create a safer response practice for firefighters and citizens; this response policy change will ensure that fire units remain strategically positioned and available to respond to true emergencies and hazards when they occur.