



InfoLink

Information for Public Safety False Alarm Reduction Professionals

FARA InfoLink September 2017 Edition

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FARA Training Symposium



Hotel and Dates are set

*DoubleTree Suites Seattle Airport
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May 1 to 3, 2018- FARA Symposium



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Holiday False Alarm Prevention

By Amanda Garner

As the holidays approach we tend to have more visitors at our homes that may not be familiar with the alarm system. Be cautious when decorating the house, keep in mind where the motion sensors are located. Remember to train anyone with a key on how to use the alarm system and cancel an accidental activation.

For more tips on Preventing Holiday False Alarms go to faraonline.org and check out all the presentations, brochures and flyers that are available.

Central Monitoring Operators: training, empathy and thinking really fast

8.30.17 - Security Systems News

YARMOUTH, Maine—A central monitoring station can be a cool place to work—if your idea of cool is not knowing what's going to happen from one minute to the next, or talking people through crises, real and perceived, or getting information fast and accurate while determining whether lives are at stake.

Experts at four security firms weighed in recently on the stressors and satisfaction that operators experience—and the kinds of support these employees receive to keep fresh.

"It can be stressful for a new hire," said Steve Crist, director of customer support center at ADS Security, based in Nashville, Tenn. "The most difficult aspect of the job is the stress of handling multiple high-priority alarms. At any time there could be a multitude of priority alarms, from a burglary to environmental alarms, all of which require immediate attention. The randomness is the unknown X factor. Sometimes the planets align in a certain way and (seemingly) everyone's alarm goes off."

A common theme among those interviewed is that ongoing professional development for veteran operators is at least as important, and possibly more critical, than the fundamental training for newbies on the job. There are limitations to what security companies can do to prepare inexperienced operators for the unforeseen and the heat of the moment at a monitoring center.

"We keep our teams small and lean," said Chris Newhook, central station manager at American Alarm and Communications Inc., based in Arlington, Mass. "It's a welcoming environment, bright, open, upbeat with esprit de corps. We keep people's interest with a diverse workday." The company spends training time with new and experienced operators, helping them walk

callers through technical trouble shooting, so that the operator doesn't automatically pass off a stressed customer to a technician. This involves more than technical training, Newhook said. It involves verbal/communication skills, empathy and quick decision-making.

"We don't have a 300-page manual for operators," Newhook said. "We might have 18 or 15 pages. Keep it tight, keep it easy. I don't ever want to hear, 'Sorry, I am just the operator.' That's not acceptable. I need thinking people."

Monitoring centers take great pride in their screening of job applicants, knowing that if they don't, the attrition rate for new hires and operator turnover will become a problem for everyone -- the company, customers and public safety agencies. "It's a difficult job," said David Smith, VP of marketing and business development at COPS Monitoring, based in New Jersey. "If you're not a good fit, in terms of temperament, emotional maturity, it can be overwhelming."

COPS has proprietary procedures for screening applicants, including psychological testing developed with the assistance of an industrial psychologist trained in matching people to jobs. The system gives the company baseline information on whether an operator has the right stuff.

A routine exchange with a customer can turn stressful, such as when the caller gives the operator a wrong password for his or her security device. "Is it because they don't know, forgot or is it because they are under duress?" Smith said. "Because we have no way of knowing, our job is to assume they gave a wrong password because they need help. Unfortunately, as you can imagine, customers are not always grateful that we sent the police after they gave us what they thought was a valid code."

In addition to an exhaustive training program for new hires, including 120 classroom hours, and several weeks of tandem training with an experience operator, COPS' system of redundancy provides operators with layers of response, expertise and backups from multiple monitoring centers.

When experienced operators reach a high level of proficiency, the company provides rewards and perks—including days off, day trips, dinner and entertainment, according to Smith.

Morgan Hertel, vice president of technology and innovation for Rapid Response, headquartered in Syracuse, N.Y., also addressed help for veteran operators. The company is well aware of an occupational hazard that may fall under the category of "human nature." When taking a stress call from a customer via mobile device at sea, for example, every operator knows that scripted responses get tossed overboard. An operator thinking on his or her feet and on the fly is one thing, Hertel noted. Asking for the right kind of help at the right time from the right source is another.

"Everybody can't be a cowboy," Hertel said. "You have to know when it's time to say, 'I need help.'"

Hertel and other supervisors stressed the importance of intense applicant screening first, then keeping new hires fresh and alert by stimulation through aggressive training. Meeting demands of the job head-on by presenting professional growth challenges seems to work. Rapid Response conducts interviews, tests for personality types, drug use and background checks. The interviews follow paper, reference and test screening. The company looks for stamina and speed. Applicants get tested for intelligence and typing. After Day One, there's a month in a highly structured classrooms with a professional trainer.

"If they make it through our rigorous training, they are tethered to a trainer on the floor for two or three more weeks," Hertel said. "For 90 days they are Q- and-A'd to death. ... There's constant learning."

Crist of ADS struck a similar tone as he spoke about the need to address pressure that can affect rookies and veterans in different ways.

"From a training perspective, we put them in a laboratory environment," Crist said of inexperienced operators. Although ADS considers it on-the-job training, "We make sure they are not thrown to the wolves."

Novices will witness a trained operator who is in a live environment—"It's the only way to prepare for the real thing," said Crist, noting that the newbie may begin by operating software while the trainer talks to a customer on the line. "Then they switch. Then they'll do both," he said.

"We'll allow customer support specialists [ADS' preferred term for operators] to receive alarms at a lower [safety risk] level. ... Alarms can range from a communications failure with an alarm panel to a silent panic alarm at a financial institution." In the latter example, the operator does not first make contact with the financial institution—they must first dispatch authorities and wait. "There are action patterns that are important to adhere to. You could be jumping off script. There's a danger with someone with even five or six years of experience to go off script. You can get someone hurt that way."

Newhook is emphatic about the importance of keeping veteran operators on their toes by challenging them to diversify their skill set, both technologically and in terms of interpersonal communication. "Sometimes it looks like busy work," he said of

the role-hopping within the company. “But sometimes busy work is not bad. It can be an opportunity to use another side of the brain. Like anything else, you’re seeking a balance. This is an agile environment.”

Training time with new and veteran operators merges technical trouble shooting with verbal/communications skills and assessments of the employee’s level of empathy and fast decision-making. Adapting and learning is embedded into American Alarm’s DNA, according to Newhook. “I’ve never been averse to change,” Newhook said. “Fortunately, my team eats it up.”

“The training can be intimidating at first,” said COPS’ Smith. “The terms and the industry as a whole are unfamiliar to new employees. So, they’re not only learning new processes, they’re also learning a new language and a new way of thinking.” As for established operators, said Crist, “The best thing we do [to manage pressure] is that we are purposeful about helping our folks be successful in other roles in the organization. We seed talents.”

Crist’s career has included work in contact centers and leadership. “My responsibility to our employees is to help build careers, and to the organization it’s to seed talent for elsewhere in the organization.”

Some ADS operators are on the job for 15 years or more, according to Crist. “Some do it for 17 years with no sign of fatigue,” he said. “For others, they may do it for three months and decide this is not for them. It’s our job to help some folks realize this may not be right for them. Otherwise we are not doing them or our customers any favors.”

[More Info](#)

Fresno State Is Giving PERS Pendants to Students to Enhance ...

9.9.17 - Security Sales & Integration

FRESNO, Calif. — Officials at California State University, Fresno, are providing personal emergency response system (PERS) pendants to students to help ensure their safety while on campus.

Campus Housing Director Erin Boele tells KFSN-TV, an ABC affiliate, the alarm devices are especially welcomed by students who walk to night classes.

“Many of them walk back and forth to apartments or to their cars and we really just want them to be aware of their surroundings and this device helps them if they’re feeling threatened,” she says.

Fresno State bought 2,000 of the mini-alarms, which sets off a 120 decibel alarm, from BASU.com. The company’s PR Director Mya Papolu says several campuses around the nation have done the same.

KFSN-TV spoke with Karli Toome, a freshman, who explains her father was about to purchase a similar PERS device for her when she found out the university was supplying them for free.

“I feel it’s a pretty safe campus, but say if I was to go off-campus or something I like to have it just to have security,” Toome says. “Make sure nothing happen — if something does I have it with me.”

Some students attached their alarms to a water bottle; others put them on their key rings.

“Definitely I’m going to put it on my key ring. I mean, walking around here at night, like in the parking lot sometimes it’s sketchy so having something like this definitely makes me feel safer,” says Haley Chapman, a senior.

“Sound is a powerful means to alert people and in a way it’s preventative,” she says. “It’s not about response it’s about prevention in the first place.

[More Info](#)

FARA’s Believe it or Not

By: Brad Shipp

- **CA: Man Breaks Into Funeral Home, Hangs Out for Hours, Steals Dead ...**
9.20.17 - CBS 8 San Diego - The business has no burglar alarm. “We’ve never needed one,” he said. “We’re a small town. Things like this typically don’t happen here.” Watch: 17-Year-Old ... [More Info](#)
- **CA: Real-life hamburger hits Ventura eatery, police say**
9.8.17 - Ventura County Star - Oak View resident Jennifer Cardinel was arrested sometime after 1 a.m. when Ventura police responded to an alarm at a Carl’s Jr restaurant... [More Info](#)

- **FL: Deerfield Beach burglary victim arrested after deputies find marijuana**
9.2.17 - 7News - WSVN-TV - Anthony Black went before a judge, Friday, just one day after his home alarm alerted the Broward Sheriff's Office to check out a disturbance. "Road patrol ... [More Info](#)
- **FL: Non-Emergency Calls Clogged 911 after Irma Hit FL**
9.12.17 - Firehouse.com - A woman living in Glen Eagle Country Club in East Naples called 911 because a fire alarm went off in her complex and a water sensor blared in her kitchen. [More Info](#)
- **GA: Alleged burglar caught eating ice cream**
9.19.17 - Online Athens - When responding to a 6:04 a.m. burglar alarm activation at the residence, police said they found Young standing in the living room while eating ice cream. [More Info](#)
- **IL: He couldn't find a teaching job, so his backup plan was dealing drugs**
9.1.17 - Chicago Sun-Times - When a burglar alarm alerted police to a burglary in progress at a Riverside ... he should have learned a lesson from the incident: Don't put a burglar alarm in ... [More Info](#)
- **MD: A torn trash bag left a bedazzled trail of jewelry for police to find suspect**
9.6.17 - Washington Post - A Maryland man is accused of stealing more than \$300,000 worth of jewelry from two stores. [More Info](#)
- **MN: Blood trail leads to burglary suspect**
9.13.17 - Mankato Free Press - At about 3 a.m. Blue Earth County Sheriff's deputies responded to a "glass break" alarm at a rural residence and upon arrival found shattered glass on a patio ... [More Info](#)
- **PA: Two Women Dressed as Nuns Tried Robbing a Bank and Failed ...**
8.31.17 - Complex - According to WNEP, the less-than-dynamic duo fled the scene after a teller activated the automatic alarm. The nuns ran like holy hell out of the bank with ... [More Info](#)
- **WA: Spokane Valley homeowner burglarized, ends up getting arrested ...**
9.12.17 - KREM.com - Deputies were notified by Bruce Marquardt's alarm company that someone had broken into his home. His home surveillance video showed a man stealing ... [More Info](#)
- **WI: 'Incinerated Pop-Tart' prompts UW dorm evacuation**
9.7.17 - Channel3000.com - WISC-TV3 - Madison, Wis. - A University of Wisconsin-Madison residence hall was evacuated Wednesday morning after an incinerated Pop-Tart set off fire alarms, ... [More Info](#)

Do you have any stories you would like to share about strange, unusual, or funny reasons for false alarms? How about outlandish things that happen in the course of your usual work day? I know we all have them, so let's share and give everyone a chuckle! Please forward your stories to bradshipp@4yoursolution.com and we'll put them in the next InfoLink for all to share!

Public Safety Updates

Courtesy of NESA

- **AB: Calgarians sound alarm over new alarm services bylaw fee**
8.30.17 - MetroNews Canada - Janet Smith and her family have had an alarm system in their home for nearly a decade and have never been charged anything by the City of Calgary—so when ... [More Info](#)
- **AZ: Reminder: Alarm codes changed for Apache Junction commercial ...**
9.12.17 - Apache Junction Independent - The Apache Junction City Council earlier this year passed and adopted an update to the city codes regarding security alarm systems (Volume 1, Chapter 16,... [More Info](#)
- **CT: Bethel Police Ask Residents, Businesses to Register Alarms**
9.7.17 - Patch.com - Local residents and businesses are asked to register their home and business alarm systems with the Bethel Police Department. Currently registered alarm ... [More Info](#)
- **GA: Atlanta City Council approves transferring Atlanta Streetcar to MARTA**
9.20.17 - MDJOnline.com - As part of the agreement, CryWolf and the city recommend amending the false alarm ordinance to reduce the failure-to-register penalty by 50 percent, resulting ... [More Info](#)
- **GA: Georgia city to shift false alarm fines to security dealers**
9.20.17 - SecurityInfoWatch - The new alarm ordinance law requires the company that installs and services an alarm to register it, and makes the company responsible for false alarm fines. [More Info](#)
- **IA: DPS announces new State fire Marshal**
9.9.17 - KCRG - ... of a state building code, a state electrical code; regulation of flammable liquid above-ground storage; and licensing for alarm system contractors and installers, ... [More Info](#)
- **NY: Hamptons Cheat Sheet: Art dealer's feuding heirs sell Southampton ...**
9.7.17 - The Real Deal Magazine - The Southampton Town Board is considering changing its policy regarding false fire alarms. Currently, home and business owners get one free pass but can be ... [More Info](#)
- **OK: Owasso now requiring registration of security alarms**
9.21.17 - KTUL - According to Owasso police, 99 percent of all alarms are false. Owasso officers have responded to more than 3,700 false alarms in the last two years -- more ... [More Info](#)

- **TX: Poteet council approves department head contracts**
9.20.17 - Pleasanton Express - Hickman asked the council to consider some sort of ordinance establishing regulations governing alarms. Several local alarms go off randomly at night, ... [More Info](#)
- **UT: False alarms leads to real bills for SLC homeowners**
9.13.17 - KUTV 2News - "Every time a firetruck, EMS or police officer has to go and respond to a false alarm, that's one less firefighter, EMT or officer available in the event of a real ... [More Info](#)

Industry News

Courtesy of NESAs

- **Best Buy to Hire Hundreds of Traveling Salespeople to Visit Customer Homes**
Best Buy's service sends in-home experts out to residences so they can help customers select the right product for their environment. [More Info](#)
- **ADS Security Acquires PMI Security to Grow North Carolina Base**
9.7.17 - SSI - The purchase of the North Carolina-based company marks ADS Security's third acquisition of 2017. [More Info](#)
- **Lone Star President Flies 8,000 Lbs. of Relief to Hurricane Harvey Victims**
8.8.17 - CI - Raymond Bailey, Lone Star president, flies planes for Angel Flight to help those in need after Hurricane Harvey hits Texas. [More Info](#)
- **Vivint Smart Home Products to Be Sold in Sprint Retail Stores**
9.12.17 - SSI - By partnering with Sprint, Vivint has further expanded the amount of brick-and-mortar stores its smart home solutions can be found. [More Info](#)
- **Security Companies Roll Up Their Sleeves, Lend Aid After Hurricane Harvey**
9.7.17 - SDM - Hurricane Harvey is estimated to be the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history. The photos show the complete devastation, and the scope of the damage is hard to believe; it's difficult to imagine any good coming out of an event such as this. However, it is exactly times like this that we see the overwhelming good some people are determined to do. [More Info](#)
- **Federal judge denies alarm companies attempt to block ...**
9.14.17 - Cook County Record - Chicago - A federal judge has, for now, denied a request from business alarm company Alarm Detection Systems Inc. (ADS) and several other security firms ... [More Info](#)

FARA Mission Statement

It is the mission of the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) to provide a forum for local government alarm ordinance professionals to exchange information on successful false alarm reduction programs, to serve as a clearinghouse for agencies seeking to reduce false alarms, and to foster an environment of cooperation among public safety, the alarm industry and the alarm users.

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Comments and suggestions regarding FARA's InfoLink are both encouraged and welcomed. If you would like to submit an article for publication, or if you have any questions or concerns about this newsletter, please contact us at 301-519-9237, or by e-mail at: info@faraonline.org

Please add FARA to your mailing list if you send out Newsletters or mailings with false alarm reduction information. Do you have a brochure that describes your ordinance or program? We would like to see it. Staff will review what we receive and share tips and information with your fellow members in later issues of this newsletter.

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