



Unwanted Fire Signals

OPS1-057

May 2018

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, Protection
(Business Fire Safety)

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1. Introduction

This policy deals with the operational response of all premises where an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) occurs (domestic and commercial), however the action levels 1 to 4 only apply to premises that fall under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 e.g. businesses, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, colleges, common area of flats etc.

Large complex premises such as hospitals and university campuses, with a large number of buildings and with high numbers of detectors may have a fire safety officer assigned to help them manage any false alarms.

The main objective of this document is to provide guidance to Critical Control and operational staff on mobilising to 999 AFA calls, and guidance to operational staff and to fire safety officers to help reduce further Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS).

The way we respond to AFA's and our positive action, will help premises reduce their false alarms and help identify:

- False alarms which may indicate poor fire safety management and
- UwFS which have an impact on Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) resources

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2. Call filtering and reducing the impact of UwFS

There are a number of different methods of receiving an AFA or fire call:

- 112/999 call direct from the premises
- From alarm Receiving Centres (ARC) monitor fire alarms from a remote location and call the fire service
- 112/999 call from a control centre in the premises
- 112/999 from member of public

There are three ways that false alarms can be filtered to prevent an unnecessary attendance to UwFS by CFRS:

i. At the premises where the fire alarm has activated:

This is the preferred method of preventing UwFS in occupied buildings and involves a competent person investigation the cause of the fire alarm before an emergency call is made to the Fire Service. The

investigation should not place anyone at risk and should be conducted by a nominated person who is able to interrogate the fire alarm panel to determine the location of the detector to identify the cause of the fire alarm. An activated fire alarm should no longer be considered the automatic trigger to call the fire service if there is no sign of fire, with the exception of domestic dwellings and residential care homes.

ii. 999 Call Filtering in Critical Control:

When a 999 AFA call is received by Critical Control (no sign of fire), the reason given for the fire alarm activation and/or the premises type will determine the level of response, and will in some cases prevent an unnecessary response or attendance. This will enable the service to continue to provide a prompt emergency response to other incidents and will reduce the impact of UwFS on the service, especially for premises that default to calling 999 without carrying out an investigation.

iii. Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC):

Buildings that use auto-diallers and an ARC should consider adding a pre-alert (delayed timer before full alarm) or disabling the auto-dialler when the building is occupied to enable staff to investigate the cause of the fire alarm.

This does not apply to residential care homes where it is necessary to summon the Fire and Rescue Service as soon as the fire alarm operates.

Important: If there is a fire in a premises that is occupied and that has an auto-dialler to an ARC, the occupiers of the premises should always backup the ARC using 999 or 112 to ensure the fire service is en-route, and should never just rely just on the auto-dialler or ARC.

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3. AFA call management between 0700hrs and 2200hrs

Regardless of the time, in all premises with the exception of **residential care homes, domestic dwellings and premises designated as a special fire risk** the activation of a fire alarm should no longer be the trigger to call the Fire Service; all other types of premises should investigate the reason for the alarm activation before calling the Fire Service.

When an AFA call is received between 0700hrs and 2200hrs the premises type should be identified. If the premises type falls into one of those listed below at the time of the call, one appliance will be mobilised to investigate the cause of the fire alarm.

- **Domestic dwelling ***
- **Residential care home***
- **Unknown property type***
- **Special fire risk***
- Hospital
- Hotel & B&B
- Boarding school
- Heritage buildings or locations where heritage items are stored (cathedral, museum, art gallery)

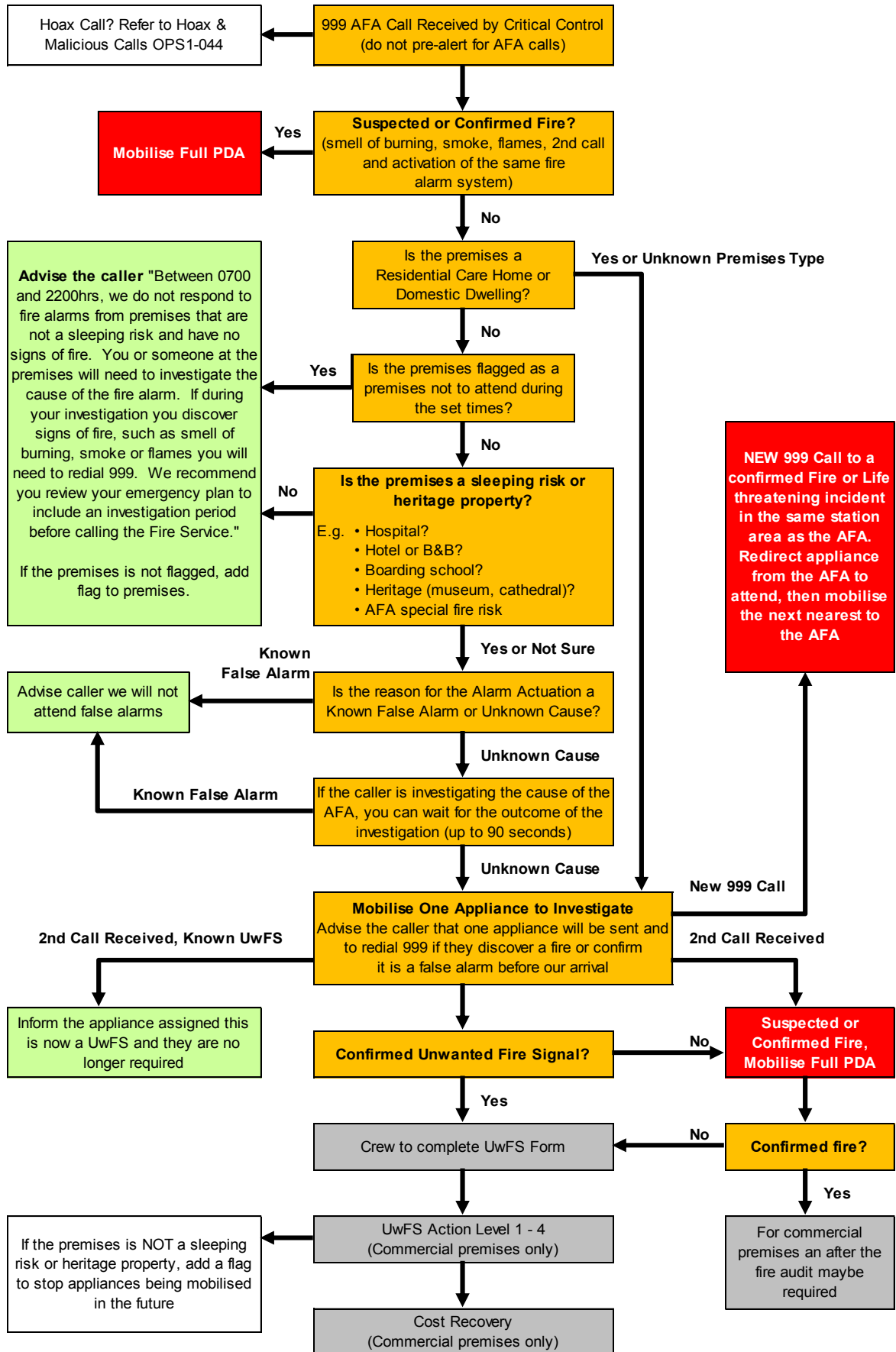
The caller should be advised that we are sending a limited response to investigate the fire alarm and they should redial 999 if they discover a fire or confirm it is a false alarm before our arrival.

If the premises is one of the types listed above and is currently occupied (**excluding domestic dwelling, residential care home and unknown property type or special fire risk premises this filter will not apply**), the caller should be questioned as to the reason for the activation of the fire alarm and mobilisation can be delayed, or prevented while an investigation to the cause of the fire alarm takes place. Critical Control can wait for the outcome of the investigation (up to 90 seconds). If after 90 seconds the caller has failed to identify the cause of the fire alarm, one appliance should be mobilised to investigate the cause of the fire alarm.

If the premises is NOT one of the types listed above, the caller should be informed of our UwFS policy and we will not respond to automatic fire alarms between 0700 – 2200hrs (see the example message on page 12 for guidance).

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AFA Call Management between 0700hrs and 2200hrs



4. AFA Call Management between 2200hrs and 0700hrs

When an AFA call is received between 2200hrs and 0700hrs (following the AFA Critical Control 2200 - 0700 flowchart) the premises type should be identified. If the premises is a domestic dwelling, residential care home, special fire risk or the premises or the type cannot be determined (e.g. it cannot be determined if the premises is a sleeping risk or heritage property) at the time of the call, one appliance must be mobilised to investigate the cause of the fire alarm upon receipt of a 999 AFA call and no filtering will apply.

The caller should be advised that we are sending a limited response to investigate the fire alarm and they should redial 999 if they discover a fire or confirm it is a false alarm before our arrival.

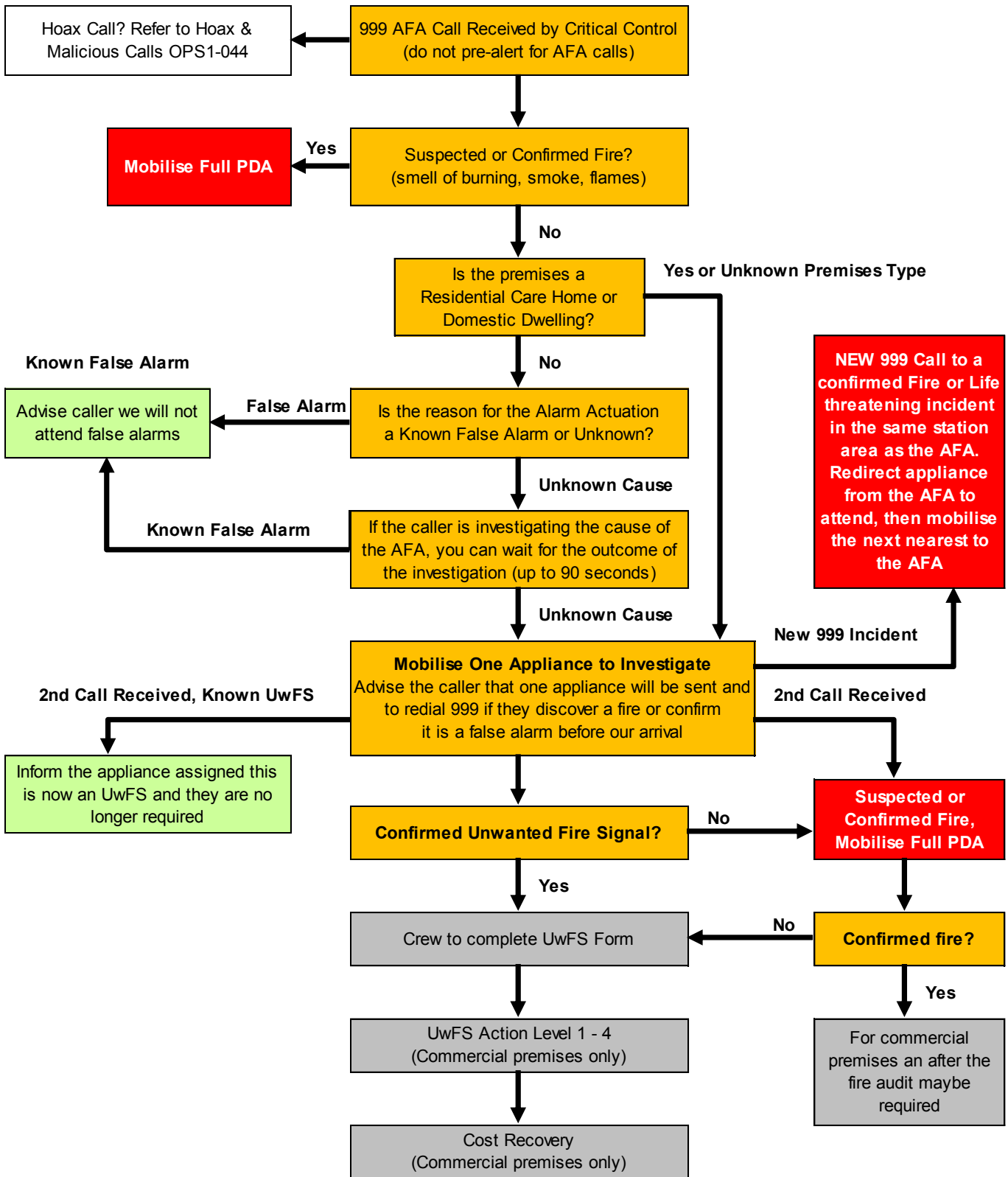
If the premises is any other type (not a residential care home, domestic dwelling, unknown premises type or a special fire risk), the caller should be questioned as to the reason for the activation of the fire alarm and mobilisation can be delayed or prevented while an investigation to the cause of the fire alarm takes place.

If the alarm actuation is a known false alarm no attendance will be made and Critical Control staff must ensure that this information is relayed to the premises or the caller.

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AFA Call Management between 2200hrs and 0700hrs



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5. Guidance on mobilisation for Critical Control

When a 999 call is received reporting an automatic fire alarm, the Critical Control operator must identify if there is any sign of fire (smell, smoke etc.) in the first instance. Pre-alerting a station should not be used for calls to reported automatic fire alarms. In all circumstances of a suspected or confirmed fire, the full PDA will be mobilised unless the call is a suspected hoax call (Hoax and Malicious Calls OPS1-044).

It is impossible to issue absolute guidance on what to ask a caller to determine whether a call to a fire alarm actuation is a true indication of a fire. Control operators will use their skill and experience to question a caller. Below is a list of signs that can be used to determine whether a fire exists.

- Flames, sparks, orange flickering glow, smoke, soot blackened windows, cracked windows
- Smell of burning/smoke, crackling sound, heat felt using the back of the hand on doors and windows
- Multiple detectors activated in close proximity to each other
- Broken call-point (where there is no notification that it was broken accidentally or maliciously)

When the fire alarm operates in a premises an investigation period should be initiated, and the Fire and Rescue Service should not be called until the outcome of the investigation is known (except for residential care homes, domestic dwellings, unknown premises type or special fire risk).

For residential care homes, domestic dwellings, special fire risk or where the premises type is unknown at the time of the call we will mobilise one pumping appliance to investigate regardless of the time of the call and the caller will not be questioned on the reason for the alarm activation. The caller must be informed that a reduced attendance has been sent to investigate the reason for the false alarm, and if it becomes clear it is a false alarm or they discover a fire or signs of fire such as smell of burning, smoke or flames before our arrival they must redial 999.

If the alarm actuation is a known false alarm no attendance will be made and Critical Control staff must ensure that this information is relayed to the premises or caller.

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For occupied properties where an attendance is required, it will be expected that the emergency plan for the premises is enacted and the evacuation process started (some exceptions may apply e.g. hospitals).

Example non-response message:

"Between 0700 and 2200hrs, we do not respond to fire alarms from premises that are not a sleeping risk and no signs of fire. You or someone at the premises will need to investigate the cause of the fire alarm. If during your investigation you discover signs of fire, such as smell of burning, smoke or flames you will need to redial 999. We recommend you review your emergency plan to include an investigation period before calling the Fire Service."

Special fire risk premises

If there is a significant risk from fire due to the **cladding of a building, compartmentation or other fire safety concern** and/or the **scale of an incident** and/or to **firefighters** and/or to the **environment** at a premises that would normally be filtered out by the policy, upon the request of the Area or Group Manager of a Command area this premises can be excluded from the automatic AFA filtering and included as a premises we would attend for a reported automatic fire alarm. For the purposes of this policy this type of premises would be classed as an 'Special Fire Risk' premises.

Investigation time limits

For occupied premises, if the caller is investigating the cause of the fire alarm (excluding residential care homes, domestic dwellings, unknown premises or special fire risk), Critical Control can wait for the outcome of the investigation (up to 90 seconds). If after 90 seconds the caller has failed to identify the cause of the fire alarm, one appliance should be mobilised to investigate the cause of the fire alarm.

Operational Response

When mobilised to an AFA the standard emergency operational response blue lights and two tones will be used (Emergency Response Driver only) to ensure a quick attendance and the appropriate status messages etc. will be used. Although drivers are permitted to use blues and two tones when responding they must take into account the appropriate level of urgency required. An AFA does not demand the same level of urgency to attend compared to a house fire with persons reported. In all cases the safety of crews and members of the public is paramount.

In all cases where an appliance is mobilised to an AFA within the town area, standby crews are not required unless a fire condition is suspected or confirmed at the premises. In the case of an AFA in a location out of town, a standby crew may be called into the station at the discretion of the officer in charge at Critical Control.

Critical Control staff will continue to have the authority to verify and modify the response to any incident or call based on their professional judgement and the information known at the time. This includes the re-deployment of an appliance mobilised to an AFA actuation to an incident seen as life threatening e.g. house fire or a road traffic collision with persons trapped.

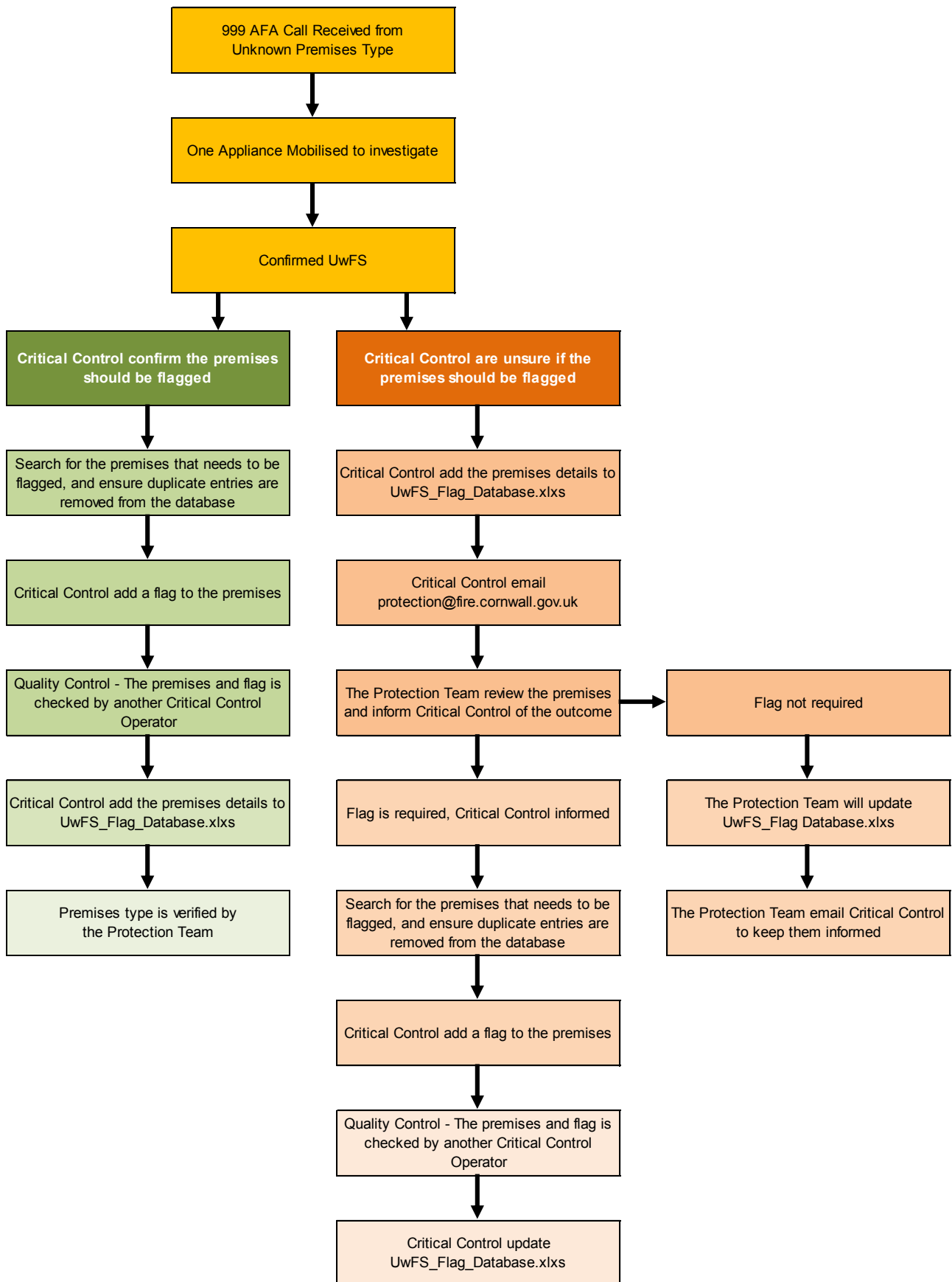
UwFS flagging procedure

If after attending the premises we discover it is one of the types of premises we should not attend, a flag should be added to the premises address in Vision so future AFA calls are filtered. Using the AFA call management flowchart as a guide and the information from the attending crew or IRS we can determine if a flag should be added to a premises address. If the address does not make it clear what type the premises falls into and further clarification is required, the details of the premises should be sent to the Command Group Manager and Station Manager for determination. The database recording all properties that have been flagged should be updated when a new flag is added or removed from a premises address in Vision (see below the flowchart for guidance).

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AFA Flag Procedure Flowchart (0700 to 2200hrs)



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6. Guidance on AFA response for operational crews

En-Route

- Standard emergency operational response (blues and twos)
- Speed appropriate to level of urgency

On Arrival

- If possible ask the responsible person:
 - Do you know why the alarm has activated?
 - Is everyone out of the building?
 - Note: The emergency plan should be in progress and the evacuation process started (some exceptions may apply for evacuation e.g. hospitals)
- Interrogated the fire alarm panel and refer to the zone plan to identify the following:
 - The location(s) of activated detector(s) or call point(s)
 - The number of zones, detectors and/or call points actuated
 - If applicable, fault indicators on the panel
- Keep one crew member at the alarm panel while you search for the activated detector or call point and remain in contact using a hand held radio (other detectors or zones may activate while searching indicating possible fire spread)
- Utilise the thermal image camera, and use your senses to look, listen and smell for signs of fire, it might be smoke, unusual noises or heat
- If a fire situation exists or is suspected, request the full PDA

Closing Down

- For false alarms your investigation should show you that the false alarm is a result of faulty equipment, malicious acts, human error, or activities near detectors
- Ensure you are fully satisfied that no fire exists before sending a STOP message with the correct Incident Reporting System (IRS) code
- Discuss the reason for the UwFS and give advice on reducing UwFS
- Complete the UwFS1 form (top copy to the customer)

- For any serious fire safety concerns contact Critical Control and request advice from a Fire Safety Enforcement Officer (do not leave the scene until you have obtained clearance to do so)
- Less serious matters can be communicated via the Exchange of Information form (EOI) and the UwFS1 pad "Additional comments" section

Post incident

- Send the yellow carbonated copy of the UwFS1 form to Community Safety Admin Team at St. Austell Community Fire Station
- If applicable complete Exchange of Information form (EOI)

7. Guidance for operational crews in attendance

When the fire alarm sounds, everyone in the building should immediately follow the fire action plan, and it should be expected the evacuation process started (some exceptions may apply e.g. hospitals). On arrival the Officer in Charge (OIC) should, if possible obtain factual information from the caller or responsible person on site to assist his or her assessment of the alarm activation. The fire alarm panel should also be interrogated as soon as possible to find out number and location of detectors that have actuated, or any faults that have been identified by the alarm panel.

If a fire situation exists or the OIC feels there are signs that indicate there is a fire at the premises, a make-up message requesting the full PDA must be sent to Critical Control without delay.

It is essential that the Incident Commander is fully satisfied that no fire situation exists before classifying the incident as a false alarm (UwFS). If the AFA is determined to be a false alarm, then a stop message must be sent with the correct IRS code to Critical Control. It is essential that you discuss the reason for the false alarm and discharge the correct advice to reduce further false alarms (see below 'advice to be discharged to the responsible person).

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Advice to be discharged to the responsible person

- In all premises with the exception of **residential care homes, domestic dwellings** and **special fire risk premises** the activation of a fire alarm should no longer be the trigger to call the Fire Service; all other types of premises should investigate the reason for the alarm activation before calling the Fire Service
- Your investigation and emergency procedure must not place yourself or staff at risk
- Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service should only be called if a fire alarm actuation is confirmed or suspected fire (residential care homes, domestic dwellings and special fire risk premises are exempt).
- Between 0700 and 2200hrs - If you dial 999 and report the activation of an automatic fire alarm and your premises is a sleeping risk, heritage property or special fire risk we will send one fire appliance to investigate the cause of the fire alarm. If your premises is **NOT** a sleeping risk, heritage property or special fire risk, we will not send a fire appliance and you will need to investigate the cause of the fire alarm yourself. If during your investigation you discover signs of fire, such as smell of burning, smoke or flames you will need to redial 999 and report a fire
- Between 2200 and 0700hrs - If you dial 999 and report the activation of an automatic fire alarm, and the cause of the fire alarm is unknown at the time of the call we will send one fire appliance to investigate

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8. Action to reduce UwFS

The action taken by CFRS will depend on the number of false fire alarms a premises has had in a rolling 12 month period. The process of reducing unwanted fire signals requires a team approach between the responsible person and CFRS and is only applicable to properties that fall under the Fire Safety Order.

If the premises has a number of repeat calls in a 24hr period (or 2 or 3 calls due to the same fault in a very short period) this will be treated as one call and would not cause the premises to jump several action levels for the same fault/cause. However, each call should be recorded using UwFS1 form by the incident commander and a copy sent to Community Safety Admin (CSA).

Action Level 1 – 1st false alarm

The incident commander of the attending crew will complete the UwFS1 form giving the top copy to someone who appears to be in charge at the premises. The carbonated copy must then be sent to CSA at St Austell Fire Station for processing.

CSA will scan the UwFS1 form into CFRMIS and annotate the UwFS section of the premises to 'Level 1', and complete the essential fields. If the premises/business has not received an UwFS Toolkit, CSA will send out a level 1 letter.

Action Level 2 – Three false alarms in a rolling 12 month period

Three false alarms, on three different days in a rolling 12 month period, a CFRMIS 'INV' (investigation) job will be raised by CSA and sent to the fire safety officer that covers that area.

The Fire Safety Officer (FSO) should:

- Review the past audit history and compliance level
- Identify when the last fire safety audit was completed
- Identify if the business is part of a primary authority
- Contact with the premises/the responsible person, to investigate the problems around the UwFS and identify if any changes or progress has been made.

The investigation should focus on:

- The fire alarm installation and maintenance
- The work processes/occupancy

- The fire safety management
- The emergency plan (specifically when they call the fire service)

This may be done by telephone call or a site visit, and a level 2 letter should be issued discharging advice to help reduce further UwFS (level 2 letter and time to be recorded in CFRMIS).

Action Level 3 – Four false alarms in a rolling 12 month period

Four false alarms, on four different days in a rolling 12 month period, a CFRMIS 'INV' (investigation) job will be raised by CSA and sent to the fire safety officer that covers that area.

The FSO should:

- Review the past audit history and compliance level
- Identify when the last fire safety audit was completed
- Identify if the business is part of a primary authority
- Review the level 2 advice in CFRMIS
- Contact with the premises/the responsible person, to investigate the problems around the UwFS and identify if any changes or progress has been made.

If after considering the above it deemed by the fire safety officer a fire safety audit would be the best course of action, CSA should be contacted to arrange an audit under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order.

The focus of the audit should be on:

- The fire alarm installation and maintenance
- The work processes/occupancy
- The fire safety management
- The emergency plan (specifically when they call the fire service)
- A general review of the fire safety in the premises

In all instances a level 3 letter should be sent discharging any advice and details of any deficiencies found in the design, installation and management of the AFA and agreeing actions to help reduce further UwFS (level 3 letter and time to be recorded in CFRMIS).

Action Level 4 – Five or more false alarms during a rolling 12 month period

Five false alarms, on five different days in a rolling 12 month period, the Group Manager Protection should be notified and a FSO will be assigned to

the premises to produce a bespoke solution to reduce the number of UwFS at the premises.

An 'INV' (investigation) job will be raised by CSA and sent to the assigned fire safety officer. A level 4 letter should be sent detailing the agreed measures to reduce the number of UwFS (letter and time to be recorded in CFRMIS).

If at any point it is felt cost recovery should be considered for this premises for further UwFS, the premises can be escalated to cost recovery if the conditions have been met (see cost recovery for details).

Cost Recovery

Cost recovery is only to be used in situations where the following conditions are met:

- The premises must have reached a minimum action level 4
- The responsible person has made little or no effort to work with us and reduce the number of false alarms

In this situation the GM protection should be notified and passed all the details of the case and should check all the preceding stages have been followed correctly. If the file is in order a cost recovery letter should be sent informing the responsible person that in future, any attendances to a false alarm at their premises may attract a charge at the current special service call rate, the premises file on CFRMIS should be annotated 'Cost Recovery'.

If an UwFS1 form is received for a premises that is on level 'Cost Recovery' on CFRMIS, GM Protection should be informed. GM Protection would then decide whether to proceed with invoicing the premises. If the decision is to proceed with cost recovery an email with all the relevant details should be sent to the business intelligence support team so Cornwall Council Shared Services can invoice the company.

Design and installation

It is essential that new AFA systems are designed and installed to BS5839:2013 Part 1, part 6 or equivalent standard. CFRS can influence this through consultation with Building Control, approved inspectors and offering advice when enforcing the installation of an AFA system through the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Business Support

Education and support from CFRS is essential in reducing the large number of premises who experience one or two UwFS in a year. These premises account for over a third of all UwFS recorded by CFRS (figure taken from 2011-12). The initial point of contact with CFRS is usually the operational crew who attend the AFA. It is essential Incident Commanders give the correct message to businesses so they should make themselves aware of the information found in the Unwanted Fire Signals Toolkit which will be sent to all businesses who have an UwFS.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order

As the fire authority, CFRS must enforce the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and this will be done as per SIS document Enforcement Procedures FSO-002. High incidences of UwFS may indicate that other deficiencies in the premises may exist so premises that have a number of UwFS will be included in our risk based inspection programme. During a fire safety audit, the FSO should investigate the current UwFS action level in CFRMIS, and the history associated with the AFA's experienced by the premises. A high number of false alarms are still undesirable even if CFRS are not called so FSO should consult BS5839:2013 Part 1 for guidance on what is the acceptable amount of false alarms.

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9. Where the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order does not apply

Article 6.—(1) This Order does not apply in relation to —

- a) **domestic premises**, except to the extent mentioned in article 31(10);
- b) an **offshore installation** within the meaning of regulation 3 of the Offshore Installation and Pipeline Works (Management and Administration) Regulations 1995(**a**);
- c) **a ship**, in respect of the normal ship-board activities of a ship's crew which are carried out solely by the crew under the direction of the master;
- d) **fields, woods** or other **land forming part of an agricultural or forestry** undertaking but which is not inside a building and is situated away from the undertaking's main buildings;
- e) an **aircraft, locomotive or rolling stock, trailer or semi-trailer** used as a means of transport or a vehicle for which a licence is in force under the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994(**b**) or a vehicle exempted from duty under that Act;
- f) **a mine** within the meaning of section 180 of the Mines and Quarries Act 1954(**c**), other than any building on the surface at a mine;
- g) a **borehole** site to which the Borehole Sites and Operations Regulations 1995(**d**) apply.

(2) Subject to the preceding paragraph of this article, this Order applies in relation to any premises.

The Fire Safety Order is enforced by CFRS other than in the following premises:

- Crown premises
- Premises within armed forces establishments
- Certain specialist premises – construction sites, ships & nuclear establishments
- Sports grounds & stands needing a safety certificate from the local authority.

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10. Monitoring UwFS

Service Delivery are responsible for responding to incidents as directed by Critical Control, including delivering fire safety advice to reduce further false fire alarms and recording any data so that follow-up action can be taken for premises that have repeat false alarms.

Fire safety officers follow-up the most frequently attended premises where false fire alarms occur (using the guidance in the policy as to the action to take) and can take appropriate action under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

To ensure this policy is delivering the required impact on UwFS and does not adversely affect our response to fires we will:

- Monitor automatic fire alarms data, and provide monthly reports to senior managers
- We will monitor reported automatic fire alarms that are reclassified as fires to review/monitor the impact of this policy

11. Abbreviations and definitions

- CFRS – Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service
- AFA – Automatic fire alarm
- False Alarm – actuation of an AFA not caused by a fire
- UwFS – Unwanted fire signal; a false alarm attended by CFRS
- ARC – Alarm receiving centre
- Fire Safety Order – Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- PDA – pre-determined attendance
- FSO – Fire safety officer including Station Manager and Assistant Fire Safety officers carrying out fire safety duties.
- AFD – Automatic Fire Warning & Detection System
- CFS – Community Safety Administration Team
- CFRMIS – Community Fire Risk Management & Information System
- CSA - Community Safety Admin
- ERD – Emergency Response Driver
- IRS – Incident Reporting System

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