



To: Community Safety Committee
From: Supt Ward Clapham, RCMP
Officer in Charge
Re: **False Alarm Reduction Strategy**

Date: February 28, 2006
File: 12-8060-20-7362-Vol 01

Staff Recommendation

That the report (dated February 28, 2006, from the OIC, RCMP), regarding False Alarm Reduction Strategy, be received for information.

Supt Ward Clapham
Officer in Charge

| FOR ORIGINATING DIVISION USE ONLY | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ROUTED TO: | CONCURRENCE | REVIEWED BY CAO | YES/NO |
| Community Bylaws | Y <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Budgets | Y <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| REVIEWED BY TAG | YES | NO | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Staff Report

Origin

At the present time, the Richmond Detachment of the RCMP acts as the primary response agency for burglar and unauthorized access alarms within the City, whether monitored or not. Unfortunately, in the majority of these cases, the alarm has been activated due to electrical or mechanical faults, unintentional activation, or staff errors in opening or closing buildings and is a false alarm.

In an effort to minimize the impact of these false alarms on the valuable resources within the RCMP, effective March 31, 2006, the Richmond Detachment will be implementing Phase I of a new "False Alarm Reduction Strategy". This Strategy is based on the promotion of a "Verified Response" alarm system using either a physical presence or the latest remote alarm technology, and is designed to make alarm service companies more proactive and accountable to the clientele they serve. Richmond, along with Langley RCMP and Victoria Police Department, will be one of 3 Policing services in British Columbia that has adopted this service to date.

Under full implementation of this new strategy, before contacting police, alarm companies would be required to monitor and verify their alarms through a contracted, first-response agency or a built-in audio / visual device that can verify the legitimacy of the tripped alarm system. If a break and enter is verified to have occurred, or is in progress, police will attend; otherwise police will not attend. The exception to the rule will be hold-up, duress and panic alarms, which police will continue to attend. Alarm companies will be required to attend to the unverified false alarms and correct the fault.

Analysis

North American studies have shown that police response to False Alarms accounts for the highest incidence of calls for service. For example, in 2004, Richmond Detachment received 51,505 calls for service, of which 7,564 or 14.8 % of the total calls were false alarms. For the following year - 2005, there were 50,102 calls for service of which 7,170 or 14.2% were false. Studies have consistently shown that the police response to alarms across North America, which in Richmond were 97.4% false in 2005, is an unproductive use of resources. Other studies indicate that 80% of the false alarms are caused by 20% of the users and most are attributed to mechanical and user error.

Alarm companies contractually design, install and monitor alarms for businesses and homes at a price but they do not attend to the false alarms or make an effort, in most cases, to repair poor quality or faulty alarms. In Richmond, as in other communities, when police attend the faulty alarms the business owner or resident is charged \$100 under the City's Public Health Protection Bylaw No. 6989. In the final analysis, the alarm companies are not affected when their products are of poor quality or faulty. An interesting fact about alarm companies in Richmond is that only a few installers work in Richmond and almost all the monitoring companies are located outside of Richmond. Previous Bylaws and Fines systems have been used to reduce alarms with limited or no effect.

RCMP will continue to work with city staff to ensure a smooth transition through the various phases of the False Alarm Reduction Strategy - including a comprehensive communication plan - so that businesses, residents, and the alarm industry are well aware of the proposed changes to the RCMP response program. As a result of meetings to date, we foresee complimentary changes to the city's procedures and bylaws to ensure that business and residential alarms are regulated by permit and all installations include a primary physical response or remote verification. RCMP will continue to monitor and evaluate this system to bring the best service possible to Richmond and any changes that may be required.

Financial Impact

Statistics and Policing Costs

| Year | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| # Alarms | 8,758 | 8,658 | 8,208 | 7,564 | 7,170 |
| Revenue Collected | \$102,000 | \$192,000 | \$263,000 | \$230,000 | \$245,000 |
| Total Files | 49,322 | 49,717 | 51,659 | 51,505 | 50,102 |
| % Alarms to yearly complaints | 17.7 % | 17.4 % | 15.8 % | 14.7% | 14.2% |
| Actual Attendance cost | \$360,000 | \$359,000 | \$337,000 | \$310,000 | \$310,000 |

Cost of attendance = 2 members x 20min (1/3 HR. EA.) = \$ 41.00

- These costs only take into account wages of the police, and not the disruption to more important duties.
- Not all false alarms are charged to the businesses or residents because of time restraints on police officers and some of the more obvious False Alarms are not attended.
- Additional Costs not included are:
 - equipment – vehicles and communications
 - administration costs to collect false alarm fines
 - phone response and dispatching
 - police record keeping

For 2006 the city budgeted \$230,000 in False Alarms revenues. The discontinuance of this service will result in a .2% tax increase impact.

Conclusion

The police can no longer continue to use their very limited resources to respond to alarms, the vast majority of which are false. With the sharp increase in the population within the City of Richmond and the increasing demands on the resources at our disposal, it is no longer practical to deploy fully trained police officers to a task that should be performed through a more cost-effective alarm response service.

Considering mounting police costs and changing priorities, there is no question that Richmond Detachment must address the problem that exists in attending a large number of false alarms. The monetary costs of policing services and time spent attending these incidents are too high to ignore. The implementation of a “False Alarm Reduction Strategy” will put police resources to better use, provide a more consistent and effective response to actual alarms, and make alarm companies more responsible and accountable for their business.

In order to ensure a smooth transition, the Richmond R.C.M.P. in conjunction with the "False Alarm Reduction Strategy Team" will consult with the community prior to the implementation.. A public media communication package will be delivered by the joint City of Richmond and R.C.M.P. Media Communications Teams. The message will be delivered through various communication strategies including local newspapers, City of Richmond Media Website, a Public Forum, and Radio News Stations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ward Clapham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ward" being more prominent than the last name "Clapham".

Supt Ward Clapham
Officer in Charge