

## **Will the Fire Service turn up when I call them?**

The following information is being provided to you as a result of feedback which STK Fire & Risk Management Ltd has received through carrying out Fire Risk Assessments across a wide range of premises types and has been confirmed by West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service.

### **1. Background to Call Challenge**

Following the findings of the inquest into the Rosepark fire in Scotland, where a number of elderly residents died, partly due to a delay in summoning the fire service, the latest revision to the British Standard for fire alarms, BS 5839, was released in June 2013 as BS 5839, Part 1: 2013. This revised standard made it a requirement for any Care Home which has more than 10 residents to have a fully addressable fire alarm system installed and that the system MUST be connected to a remote Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) so that automatic calls for fire service assistance are made, thus eliminating the possibility of long delays in staff calling for assistance.

### **2. Compliance Standard – Remote Monitoring**

In adjudging the acceptability of a fire alarm system in a Care Home we as your Risk Assessors must ensure that the alarm, if installed after June 2013, is connected to an ARC. Where this is not the case we are duty bound to make this a significant finding of the report and recommend that connection to an ARC is made. However, where you are responsible for a Care Home, it is vital that the limitations imposed by Call Challenge are made absolutely clear to you as it has become apparent that many persons are totally unaware of the presence of Call Challenge and its implications.

### **3. Call Challenge as an overall concept**

Due to limited Fire Service resources, and the high numbers of calls for assistance which were generated by fire alarm systems within buildings, measures have been put in place. In essence, Call Challenge works like this:

- i. Premises fire alarm activates
- ii. Premises evacuated by all persons
- iii. 999 / automatic monitored call made to fire service
- iv. If fire cannot be confirmed by caller, fire service will not attend – or will only mobilise a specialist Business Support Vehicle (BSV) to investigate the cause of the alarm
- v. If fire is confirmed by caller, or there are valid concerns that fire is suspected (smell of smoke, etc) a full emergency mobilisation is made by fire service

### **4. How to plan for Call Challenge**

Reliance upon the immediate mobilisation of the fire service to an automatically generated fire alarm cannot be relied upon, therefore all alarm activations should be investigated by trained staff so as to establish if a fire is actually in progress. If a fire cannot be confirmed, then the fire service will not attend until such a confirmation is made.

The premises' emergency plan needs to reflect the requirement to search the premises to establish the presence, or not, of a fire. This is relevant to all premises types.

Specific training should be given to staff within residential Care Homes where there may only be 2 or 3 staff on duty during the night time hours. These staff must be made aware that even if the premises' fire alarm is connected to an ARC that they MUST call 999 if a fire is confirmed. Where a fire alarm is connected to an ARC, it is anticipated that where an alarm signal is received by an ARC from a Care Home, the ARC will attempt to contact staff at the Home to determine if a fire is actually in progress. Staff should be made aware of this and the premises' telephone should be answered, even during an evacuation where at all possible.

## **5. Guidance and Support**

Further support regarding any revisions which may need to be made to your premises' emergency plan, as a consequence of Call Challenge, can be provided by us at STK Fire & Risk Management Ltd upon request or as part of our 12-month support package which comes with all Fire Risk Assessments produced by us. Specific detail regarding Call Challenge within the West Midlands area can be found on the West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service website at <https://www.wmfs.net>. For other Brigade areas similar information will be contained within the main website of the Brigade within whose area the premises are situated.

If you have any specific issues you need to talk through as regards Call Challenge, or indeed any other fire safety related matter, please contact us at the address/telephone number given below and we will be happy to help, where we can.

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