

# SECURITY SYSTEMS NEWS

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## GUEST COMMENTARY

### What happens when the police say 'no'?

BY JOHN A. MURPHY

I am very passionate about the non-response policies that are confronting our industry and our customers. Although most in our industry know something about the problem, all of us need to become intimately familiar with it.

Let's begin with the basics. This problem is primarily ours to rectify, not our customers' or the responding departments'. Passing responsibility onto others will only keep us from focusing on the task at hand.

Although our customers, responding authorities and industry manufacturers are all integral parts of a solution, in my opinion installing and monitoring companies need to take a leading role. If the proliferation of non-response policies is allowed to continue, we will ultimately suffer the most. Why? Because the dispatching of the appropriate public response agencies is an essential component of our cycle of service to our customers, and it has to be maintained, nurtured and preserved. I'm hopeful that we can...if we all work together.

Our quarrel is not with end users and responding departments, but with false dispatches themselves, their drain on public resources, and their long-term effect on the efficacy of our industry.

Recently I had the opportunity to present a seminar along with Ron Walters from the Coordinated Alarm Reduction Effort (CARE) program to a group of the largest multi-site retailers at the International Mass Retailers Association (IMRA) at their annual Loss Prevention, Audit & Safety (LPAS) conference. It was the type of opportunity that our industry should actively pursue. Although the

nation's largest multi-site retailers are a significant user group, there are others like them in every business community who should be equally informed by one of us.

Our presentation examined the emergence of the false dispatch and resulting non-response reflex nationwide and introduced those who attended to a problem they may not have been sufficiently aware of. You see, the false dispatch epidemic is still flying largely under the multi-site retailers' radar screens, and while it's clear that the multi-site retail environment itself creates a large number of false dispatches, it's also clear that retailers have the internal resources and hopefully now the urgency to reduce them. But by the time they were forced to confront the problem, (without proactive assistance from our industry), it would have grown even further out of control, affecting police responses in many additional major markets.

Retailers are like most alarm users; they feel that alarm technology is stable and mature and until now have responded to the increasing false alarm fines simply by increasing their budgets to pay for them. They've directed their highest attention to reducing losses occurring within the store location through shoplifting and internal theft, while forgetting the grass roots value of their building's alarm system. Thieves (dishonest employees and shoplifters) do the most financial damage inside, so retailers dedicate a greater degree of their attention and budget to reduce shrinkage inside their stores.

What will happen when the effectiveness of their alarm system (their first line of defense) is negatively impacted by a lack of police response? That's a reality most are unprepared for. Our message was to make false dispatch reduction an everyday event, as elementary as balancing their cash drawers.

Can you help create a comparable user awareness initiative? If we don't act now, it won't take long for someone else to act in our place. If we fail to manage the problem, public agencies will manage it for themselves, and with *their* best interests in mind. I can appreciate their motivations. Systems of fines just didn't work, because abusers opted to continue paying and paying instead of rectifying the problem. Municipalities, frustrated in their attempt to reduce the burden, then look ultimately to the approach that will *solve* the problem for *them*.

That approach comes in drastically different forms. From Salt Lake City's refusal to respond to anything except an alarm verified first by an eyewitness, to more tempered designs in use by Montgomery County, Md., and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., municipalities are stepping up to the plate to pull the ball into their best field.

When that happens, and it's happening throughout the country, municipalities need to be counseled to refrain from just taking the easiest way out. There are several approaches that are more inclusive of everyone's interests.

In the end, this may become a challenge of actually attaining an ideal in life.

That may be a hard thing to swallow, because too many of us have grown accustomed to believing it's impossible to reach an ideal. I'm not one of them, and I hope you're not one, too! Ideally, no public response agency wants to refuse a response to a legitimate alarm. Ideally, no alarm company wants to send them to one that isn't, and ideally no alarm user wants to needlessly burden his/her public responder. Ideally, We (our industry, the consumer, and responding agencies) all want the same thing. We want the consumer to enjoy cost effective and reliable peace of mind. We want the responding departments to consider our services an ally in the war against crime, by reducing the burglary rate and the time needed to investigate burglaries. We want our industry to enjoy the respect, validity and the success it really deserves.

I believe everyone realizes that nothing can compare to the quality of security that our industry's services provide, but realities can become unfairly skewed by perceptions, either real or imagined.

We all need to do our part now! Whether you're a large company or small, service a broad market or a specific niche, make false dispatch reduction a part of your day-to-day contact with customers. If we all pitch in together, we can beat this problem by educating one customer at a time. Put your own plan together; one that works for your customer base. Then put it into action as soon as you can.

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