

**The Highland Council**  
**Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities**  
**Committee – 30 September 2015**

**Unwanted Fire Alarm Management Update**  
**Report by Local Senior Officer for Highland – Area Manager**  
**Scott Hay**

Agenda Item	<b>6(b)</b>
Report No	<b>CPE/15/15</b>

**Summary**

This Report provides an overview of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) as well as the operational activity within the Highland area attributable to UFAS and the work being undertaken by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and local personnel to reduce the impact on the service and local communities.

**1. Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals**

- 1.1 A UFAS incident may be defined as “an event which has required an operational attendance by the fire and rescue service due to the unwanted actuation of a fire alarm system”
- 1.2 Historical data indicates that only 3% of UFAS incidents are as a result of fire and in the case of the remaining 97%, although the fire and rescue service attended, there was no intervention required by firefighters.

SFRS records indicate that in the fiscal year ending 31 March 2015, nationally the service responded to 27,290 UFAS incidents in non-domestic premises which equates to 32% of all emergency calls attended. Within the Highland context, local firefighters responded to 1,003 UFAS incidents in non-domestic premises which equates to 27% of all operational activity in the Highland area.

Whilst the Highland area performs better than the national average in relation to the number of UFAS incidents attended in comparison to total incidents attended, it still forms by far the largest proportion of operational activity. Therefore it is essential that SFRS personnel continue to work with dutyholders to reduce these incidents for the following reasons:

- UFAS incidents cause disruption to the business of the premises involved resulting in loss of revenue and reputational damage
- UFAS incidents can divert essential fire and rescue service resources from potential emergency situations

- UFAS incidents can increase the risk to fire and rescue personnel, other road users and the community. UFAS incidents can attract the attendance of as many as three fire engines and across the Highland area in 2014/15, false alarm calls in non-domestic premises equates to an average of more than 2,500 unnecessary blue light journeys and across Scotland to almost 70,000 unnecessary journeys.
- UFAS incidents have a significant financial impact. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) estimates the cost of a single UFAS incident as £1970. With current activity levels, in the Highland context that is almost £2m per year and in the national context this equates to almost £54m per year
- UFAS incidents can disrupt the training of operational fire and rescue personnel; can disrupt demand reduction, community safety and fire safety enforcement activities and have a detrimental environmental impact with fire engines having to make unnecessary journeys

## **2. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Approach to UFAS**

- 2.1 On 1 December 2014, SFRS introduced a UFAS Policy, the aim of which is to provide a single national framework that can be fairly and consistently applied locally to target demand reductions from UFAS incidents across Scotland.

The policy is supported by a UFAS procedure which details a sequence of effective actions that are considered measured and appropriate and operates on the principal of meaningful engagement and partnership, working with the dutyholders of the premises involved.

It should be noted that the UFAS Policy and Procedure does not apply to single private dwelling houses. Where multiple false alarms are received to any individual's home, Community Safety staff will engage at the earliest opportunity.

Through the implementation of the UFAS policy and procedure, SFRS aims to:

- Reduce the overall number of mobilisations to UFAS incidents
- Filter calls generated by fire alarm systems, thus ensuring that an appropriate operational response is always despatched
- Identify premises that create demand and implement a robust system to reduce future UFAS incidents
- Engage with stakeholders in order to advise them of the actions which may taken by themselves and SFRS to manage UFAS incidents

- Provide a means to stage the normal Pre Determined Attendance at identified trigger points
- Support Fire Safety Enforcement activities

### 3. Application of Process

On receipt of a call, control staff within the receiving Operations Control will interrogate the call to ensure that the most appropriate response or Pre determined Attendance (PDA) is mobilised. The response will be one of the following:

- **Fire PDA** – full pre determined response to a suspected fire
- **Fire Alarm PDA** – where a call is filtered and the cause is undetermined then the fire alarm will be mobilised. This is a normal blue light response however, 1 appliance will be removed from the weight of response. A minimum of 1 appliance will always be mobilised and premises designated as sleeping risks will always attract a minimum of 2 appliances. If a subsequent call is received confirming a false alarm, the attendance will be reduced to UFAS PDA.
- **UFAS Incident PDA** – This is an examination only PDA where only 1 appliance will be dispatched at normal road speed for inspection purposes.
- **Stage 4 PDA** – In the case of frequent UFAS incidents, a decision may be made to stage the PDA by dispatching one appliance at normal road speeds for inspection purposes on all occasions a call is received. This will be a temporary measure only and will be reviewed once corrective steps have been taken.

The SFRS will adopt a bottom up approach to the management of UFAS incidents thus ensuring that early interventions can be taken as close to the local point of service delivery as possible.

When the service makes an attendance at a UFAS incident the appliance commander will be responsible for issuing advice and guidance to the premises dutyholder and shall record all appropriate information on a UFAS form, a copy of which is left with the dutyholder and a copy retained by the service for recording purposes.

The information obtained on the UFAS form will then be transferred into a database which will allow for activity levels, patterns and trends with specific premises to be identified.

Within the UFAS procedure, 4 stages of UFAS activity are identified and the associated actions of SFRS are detailed below:

### **Stage 1 – low level activity**

Operational personnel will engage with the premises and provide advice specific to the each premise

### **Stage 2 – 5 or more UFAS incidents in 3 months**

Follow up action will be initiated and the service will continue to engage with the premises, however this will be done by the Station Manager with geographic responsibility for that area. A copy of the previous UFAS activity will be provided to the dutyholder and a letter will be issued advising that persistent false alarms may result in the staging of the emergency response

### **Stage 3 – 10 or more UFAS incidents in 6 months**

The local Prevention and Protection Group Manager will review the activity and details associated with each UFAS incident. A local Fire Safety Enforcement Officer may then be instructed to visit the premises and carry out a Fire Safety Enforcement Audit which will inform future enabling or enforcement activity

### **Stage 4 – 20 or more UFAS incidents in 9 months**

The Local Senior Officer will discuss the issue with the Director of Service Delivery for the area and the Director of Prevention and Protection with a view to staging the premises pre determined attendance to one appliance only at normal road speeds for all calls to the premises where no fire is confirmed. The decision to implement a staged response will take into account all relevant information and will also follow a specific appliance reduction decision matrix

## **4. Highland Information**

Since the introduction of the UFAS Policy and Procedure on 1 December 2014 until 20 August 2015, there have been 661 UFAS incidents within the Highland LSO area. There have been 6 premises that have triggered Stage 2 activity and 3 premises that have triggered Stage 3 activity levels as summarised in the list below. There have been no premises identified for Stage 4 activity.

### **Level 2**

2 x Healthcare Premises in Inverness  
1 x Healthcare Premises in Fort William  
1 x Retail Unit in Inverness  
1 x Public building in Dingwall  
1 x Processing Plant in Dingwall

### **Level 3**

2 x Healthcare Premises in Inverness  
1 x Processing Plant in Dingwall

There are a significant number of premises that fall just short of stage 2 activity and local personnel will continue to engage and provide the dutyholders for these premises with advice and guidance on the reduction of UFAS events.

## **5. Future Developments**

The SFRS Prevention and Protection Directorate is currently developing a database which will be made available to all operational personnel for the purposes of recording UFAS incident activity in a consistent manner. This will assist in ensuring that a consistent approach is being adopted across the country and will also provide robust data to support future intervention and demand reduction activities.

Once this database is established and all data is available, an update report will be provided for a future meeting of the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee.

### **Recommendation**

Committee Members are invited to **note** and **discuss** the content of this report.

**Group Manager John MacDonald**

**Prevention & Protection – Highland & Islands LSO areas**

**19 September 2015**