



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

Time for Change

Reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

Evaluating Options for
Responding to Automatic
Fire Alarms

An information booklet in support of the Stakeholder Workshop on 24 February 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has embarked on a journey to change the way it manages the level of demand created by responding to automatic fire alarm (AFA) actuations, that turn out to be unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS). Despite the efforts of the SFRS and partners, reducing this type of false alarm continues to be particularly challenging and is having an unnecessary impact on our services, businesses, and wider communities.

We face this challenge with the backdrop of unmatched external change pressures such as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the changing risk profile within our communities and uncertainties around the EU exit.

Therefore, we need to develop innovative approaches for managing UFAS demand that will help build capacity and improve flexibility to adapt and meet these challenges and risks, ensuring the best possible outcomes for the Service and communities of Scotland.

In changing the way in which we manage UFAS demand, the SFRS has prioritised evaluating different models for responding to AFA actuations and will be making decisions through an options appraisal process. We want staff and stakeholders to be part of this decision-making process and invite you to participate in a workshop, that will explore a range of options for responding to AFA actuations.

This booklet and other documents that make up the information pack, aim to prepare you for participating in the workshop. In conjunction with the online questionnaire, we are asking you to complete prior to attending the workshop, your involvement will ensure decisions are informed by those who have an interest in the outcome of the options appraisal.



WHAT IS A UFAS?

A UFAS is a type of false alarm and is defined as follows:

UFAS DEFINITION

When a call is received because of an AFA actuation which has not been caused by a fire, to which the fire service responds –this is termed as an “Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal (UFAS)”

UFAS are incidents initiated by AFA systems operating within non-domestic properties and are by far the greatest contributor to the problem of false alarms in Scotland.

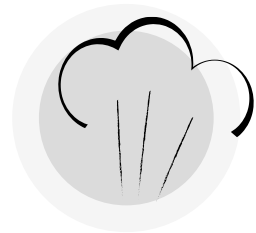
AFA systems incorporating detectors or manual break glass call points are installed to raise the alarm and to give as much time as possible for people to escape from a building prior to a fire taking hold. Within the workplace they form a vital part of any fire safety strategy and remain one of the most effective ways to keep businesses, staff and customers safe from fire.

However, most signals from these systems are not actually activated by fires – they are false alarms, and if transmitted to the fire and rescue service, will generate a UFAS which subsequently leads to fire crews being called out unnecessarily.

There can be many reasons for AFA systems activating and resulting in a UFAS incident including:



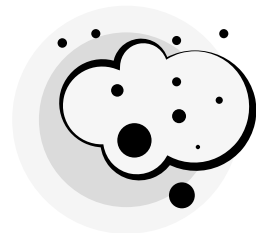
Cooking fumes
e.g. burnt toast



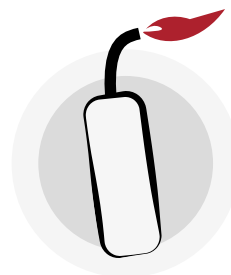
Steam
e.g. shower rooms,
industrial processes



Smoking materials
e.g. cigarettes, matches,
candles and incense



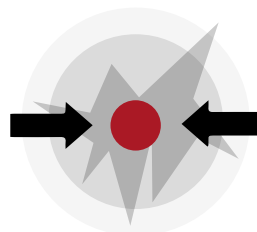
Dust build up
e.g. poor housekeeping,
lack of preventative measures
for dusty work



Hot work
from cutting and welding



Aerosol sprays



Accidental or malicious
damage to a
'Break Glass' point



Testing or maintenance
without having/following
process to manage this

WHAT IS A UFAS?

Historically, the SFRS has responded to all AFA system actuations. However, it does so on the basis that there is no legal responsibility to respond to these systems, to establish if there is a fire.

It is the legal responsibility of duty holders to ensure the safe evacuation of relevant persons in the event of fire, and to notify the fire service of any fire.

INFORMATION

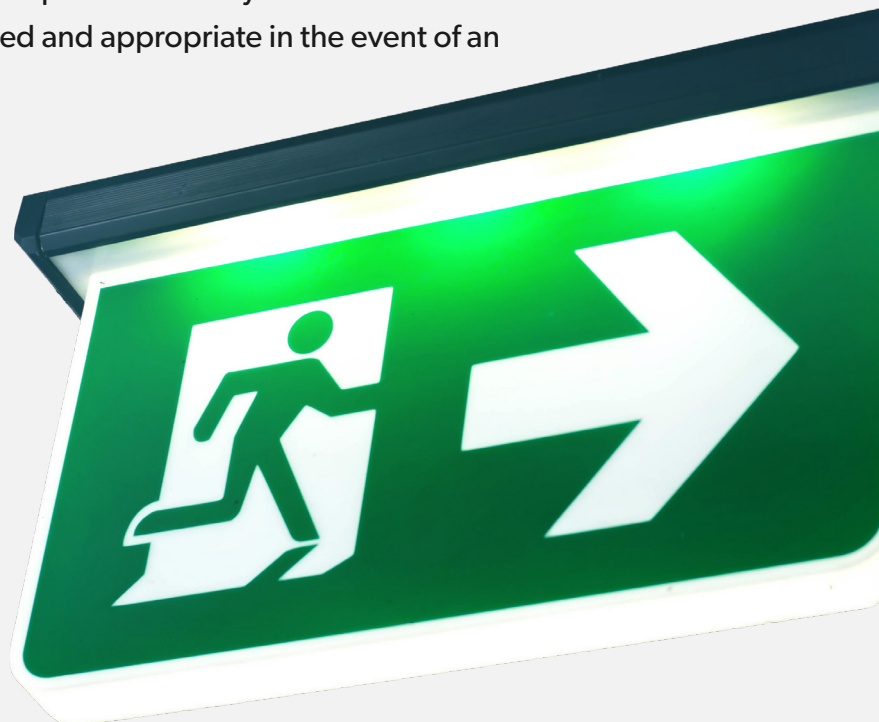
Over the last 5 years, 2% of AFA actuations from non-domestic properties that were received by the SFRS were actual fires.

Notably, the majority required no firefighting as they were small, confined to the room of origin and out on arrival.

INFORMATION

Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 places requirements on duty holders of relevant premises to undertake an appropriate fire safety risk assessment which must consider what actions are required and appropriate in the event of an emergency.

AFA systems are designed to put these actions into practice, that would include response to an alarm, investigations and subsequent evacuations, and it is not SFRS 's responsibility to form part of or be included in those plans. The duty holder should also have means to confirm any fire through the 999 system as part of those procedures to ensure life safety.



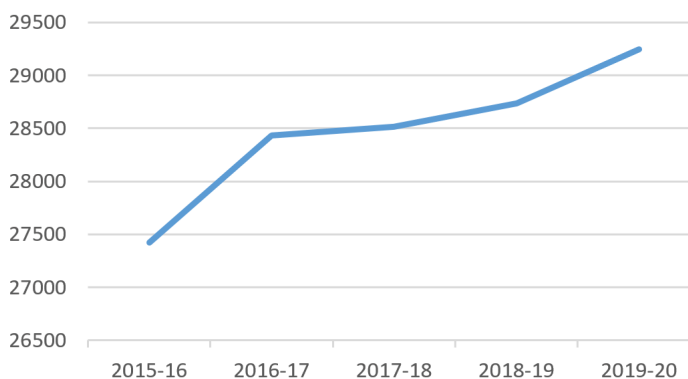
THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

False alarms and resulting UFAS incidents, have been an issue for the UK Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) for many years. In Scotland, the problem pre-dates fire service reform, and the establishment of the SFRS in April 2013. In terms of costs, the Fire Industry Association estimated that false alarms cost the UK up to £1 billion every year¹ and whilst only part of these costs apply to Fire & Rescue Services through responding to them, the amounts are quite significant.

Based on the five financial years from 2015/16 to 2019/20, the SFRS has attended an average of 28,471 UFAS incidents every year, which accounts for 31% of all incidents attended by the Service.

This makes UFAS incidents the biggest contributor to SFRS operational demand, exceeding the number of other types of false alarms, actual fires and special service incidents attended by the Service every year.

UFAS INCIDENTS 2015-16 - 2019-20

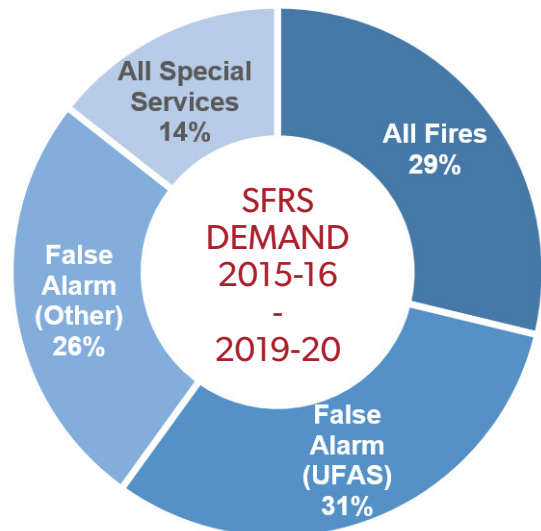


¹ Fire Industry Association – Cost of False Alarms, 2013

² Managing Automatic Fire Signals 2015, SFRS, HM Fire Service Inspectorate

³ Live Investigation of False Fire Alarms, British Research Establishment (BRE), April 2015

⁴ Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016, Scottish Government, 01 September 2016



Since the establishment of the SFRS in 2013, many factors have reinforced UFAS as a national issue and placed tackling this issue into much sharper focus:

- The requirement to develop and implement an effective national policy for managing UFAS demand, following merger of the eight former regional fire and rescue services;
- The recommendations arising from Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) Report on Managing Automatic Fire Signals²;
- The recommendations arising from the British Research Establishment (BRE) multi-stakeholder project, which analysed the causes of false fire alarms in Glasgow City³;
- The publication of The Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016⁴, which introduced reducing UFAS as one of the Scottish Ministers' priorities for the SFRS to progress;
- Setting a national target of reducing UFAS by 15 percent between 2017 and 2020;
- Continuing high levels of UFAS demand, despite the above factors and the efforts to reduce them.

THE IMPACT OF UFAS

On average, the SFRS responds to

78 UFAS incidents every day

This equates to a UFAS incident every: **18** minutes

The average time spent by fire crews at each UFAS incident is **30 minutes**

...this means

14,235

hours of productive time every year.



The SFRS mobilises an average of **2 fire appliances** to every UFAS incident.

This means an estimated **57,000** unnecessary blue light journeys every year.

High levels of UFAS demand are therefore having an impact on the SFRS and the communities of Scotland.

UFAS incidents have a **major impact on the SFRS** due to:

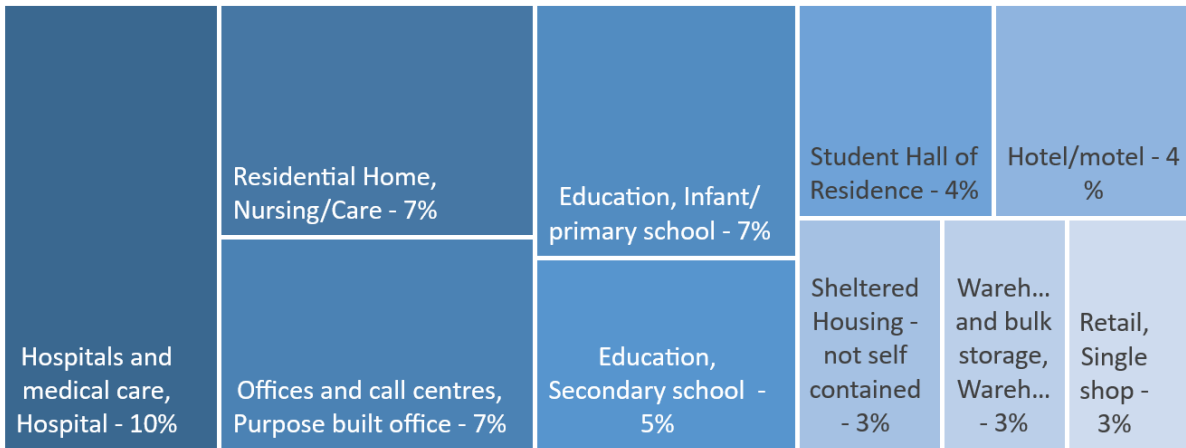
- Diverting essential services from real fires and rescues (putting lives at risk).
- Unnecessary road risk to fire crews and the public while responding (accidents).
- Disruption to training, fire safety and community safety engagement activities (education saves lives), and
- Direct cost of responding (fuel used and payments to Retained Duty System Firefighters for being called-out to attend).

The impact of **UFAS incidents on the community** includes:

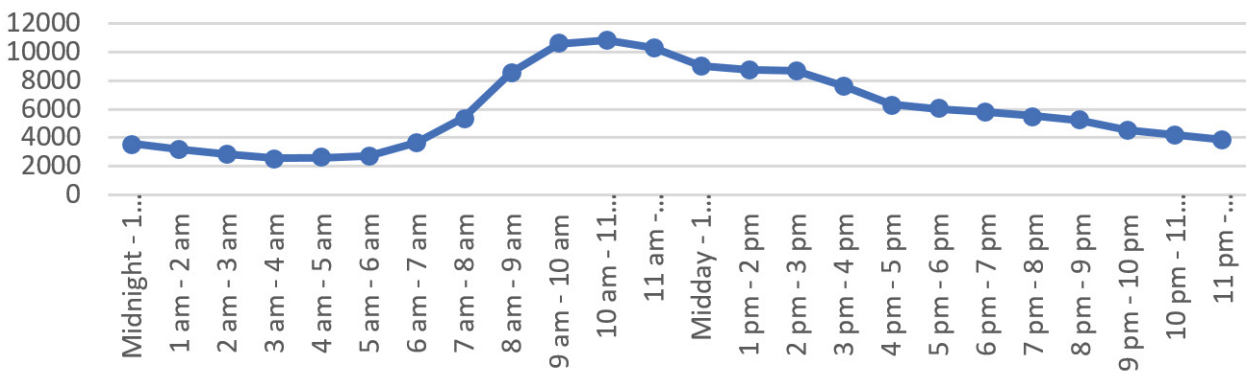
- Disruption of business (time wasted, loss of business).
- Disrupts customer activities, causes inconvenience to residents.
- Causes complacency by being treated as 'just another false alarm.'
- Cost to local businesses when Retained Duty System Firefighters are released from work to attend a UFAS.
- Impact on the environment due to unnecessary appliance movements, and
- A drain on public finances.

THE IMPACT OF UFAS

TOP 10 PROPERTY TYPES CAUSING UFAS INCIDENTS 2015-16 - 2019-20



UFAS INCIDENTS BY TIME OF DAY 2015-16 - 2019-20



TIME FOR CHANGE

The SFRS is rightly placing increased emphasis on tackling UFAS demand and has ambitions for achieving significant improvements in performance and releasing capacity to meet future challenges and risks. Reducing UFAS incidents is a priority of the Scottish Government and the SFRS is responding to this ask.

The SFRS's recent UFAS Stocktake Review⁵ concluded, that if the Service has ambitions to achieve significant UFAS reductions within reasonable timescales, the effectiveness of its current approach needs improving, or policy changes need to be made.

Through an online survey to review COVID-19 interim AFA response arrangements⁶ and a series of staff engagement sessions, where staff shared their views on the future direction of the service⁷, there is evidence that staff feel the Service can make better use of resources by changing the response and stopping/reducing UFAS incidents. These factors have further highlighted the need for change and the SFRS is acting.

INFORMATION

At a meeting of the SFRS's Strategic Leadership Team on 23 June 2020, a report outlining the recommendations arising from the UFAS Stocktake Review were presented to the SLT and subsequently approved for implementation.

The recommendations proposed changes for transforming the SFRS's UFAS approaches.

In response, the SFRS has now embarked on a change programme, that aims to transform the way it manages operational demand caused by responding to UFAS incidents. The programme will prioritise and manage the change from the Service's existing UFAS approaches to a new UFAS Demand Management Framework.

This framework will integrate key strategies including resource allocation, partnership working, communications and engagement, and provide clarity and cohesiveness to what the SFRS will be doing to reduce UFAS incidents and how it will work with partners to tackle the challenges of reducing AFA actuations that cause them in the first place.

⁵ Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals – A SFRS Stocktake Review, March 2020

⁶ Impact of COVID-19 Interim Blanket One Pump Attendance Strategy – SFRS Online Internal Survey, September 2020

⁷ SFRS Future Vision Internal Focus Group Sessions, November 2020

TIME FOR CHANGE

In making the transition to a UFAS Demand Management Framework, the SFRS will initially focus on resource allocation by prioritising the evaluation of different models for responding to AFA actuations.

The Service will be doing this through an options appraisal where staff and stakeholders will be involved in evaluating options that have the potential to reduce UFAS incidents and deliver significant benefits.

THE BENEFITS

- Improved firefighter and community safety through the reduction of blue light journeys;
- Improved availability of resources for attending real emergencies;
- Increased time available for training, prevention and diversionary activities;
- Extra capacity to meet future challenges and risks, and do so much more for the communities of Scotland;
- Reduced response costs; and
- Reduced fleet carbon emissions

In considering options, the SFRS will be following the majority of other UK FRS's in reviewing and changing their response as a tried and tested way to reduce UFAS incidents and unnecessary blue light journeys.

We will therefore look at lessons learned from other UK FRS's and any identified good practice, during the decision-making process.



GETTING INVOLVED IN THE OPTIONS

The options appraisal is a key step in the development of a business case for SFRS responding to AFA actuations in the future. The SFRS has commenced an options appraisal and narrowed down feasible options for responding to AFA actuations.

These will now provide the basis for completing a detailed assessment and analysis of the options, then scoring and ranking them for public consultation later this year.

There is no decision on which is the preferred option. The SFRS wants its staff and stakeholders to get involved in the decision-making process. That is why the Service is inviting you to a workshop to consider the options for responding to AFA actuations, that have the potential to reduce UFAS and blue-light journeys.

We will be asking you to participate fully in the process, considering the benefits and risks of each of the options that have been identified.

The options will be considered against set assessment criteria with a consensus achieved by the workshop participants in awarding scores and ranking the options. The '**Benefits and Risks Assessment**' Briefing Note, contained within your information pack, provides an overview of the assessment criteria that will be used to assess and score the benefits and risks of each option being considered.

We propose to split the workshop participants into assessment panels. All panel members will have access to a summary of relevant evidence provided within this booklet and other documents contained within the information pack. This will be supplemented through an information session conducted on the day, as a precursor to the workshop.

The remainder of this document sets out the shortlist of options that will be assessed at the workshop and what happens next in the process.

KEY STAGES						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Defining the Options Appraisal Objectives	Developing the Options	Three Assessing and Analysing the Options	Ranking the Options	Carry out Public Consultation	Report Findings and Agree Preferred Option	Implement Preferred Option

Options Appraisal Process –
key stages for developing a business case for responding to AFA actuations

THE OPTIONS

The **'How We Arrived at The Shortlist' Briefing Note**, contained within the information pack, provides a detailed account of the process, criteria and workings that were used to rule out options and arrive at the final shortlist below.

These options will now be taken forward for more detailed assessment and analysis. This is explained in the **'Benefits and Risks Assessment' Briefing Note**, contained within the information pack.

OPTION 1

Pre-COVID-19 Response (Do Nothing) – Call challenge all AFA's from non-domestic premises and respond with minimum one fire appliance. Exemptions apply to sleeping risk premises and calls originating from Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC).

This is the SFRS's routine strategy for responding to AFA's, which is covered within the SFRS UFAS Policy and associated procedures and will be considered as the baseline for assessing the other four options against.

Call Challenge

Operations Control (OC) operator asks the caller a series of questions and following set criteria, determines an appropriate number of fire appliances to mobilise.

Weight of Response

There are four levels of AFA Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA), the one selected by OC is based on the outcome of the call challenge. Policy decision, is to mobilise at least one fire appliance to every AFA call, with at least two fire appliances mobilised to sleeping risk premises. Calls confirming an actual fire, will attract an immediate full fire PDA response.

Exemptions

Sleeping risk premises are exempt from call challenging. Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) are generally exempt from call challenging.

OPTION 2

COVID-19 Interim Response – Immediate response to unconfirmed AFA's with blanket one pump response. Exemptions apply to high risk premises types.

This was implemented in May 2020, in response to the fast-moving COVID-19 pandemic and is still in operation as the SFRS's interim strategy for responding to AFA actuations.

Immediate Response

On receipt of an AFA call, the OC operator will mobilise a response.

Weight of Response

A blanket one fire appliance response is mobilised to premises, following receipt of an AFA call. Calls confirming an actual fire, will attract an immediate full fire PDA response.

Exemptions

Sleeping risk premises amongst other certain high-risk premises.

OPTION 3

Challenge all AFA's from non-domestic premises and respond only to those processed through call challenging, or to premises types exempt from call challenging. In these instances, the number of fire appliances is dependent on time of day and premises type.

Call Challenge

OC operator asks the caller a series of questions and following set criteria, determines whether an emergency response is required following the actuation of an AFA. No response is mobilised, if questioning from the OC operator confirms there is no fire, or physical signs of fire.

Weight of Response

If the call challenging process confirms an actual fire, a full fire PDA is mobilised. If the call challenging process cannot verify the cause of the AFA, the OC operator has the discretion to mobilise an appropriate weight of response based on factors such as time of day and premises type.

Exemptions

Sleeping risk premises will be exempt from the call challenging process and therefore receive an immediate response based on time of day and premises type. The immediate response to exemptions are as follows:

- Residential Care Homes will receive 2 fire appliances regardless time of day
- All other sleeping risks will receive one fire appliance between 0700 – 1800hrs and two fire appliances out-with these hours.

OPTION 4

Call challenge all AFA's from non-domestic premises and respond only to those where the call challenging process cannot verify the cause of the AFA. No exemptions to call challenging apply.

Call Challenge

OC operator asks the caller a series of questions and following set criteria, determines whether an emergency response is required following the actuation of an AFA. No response is mobilised, if questioning from the OC operator confirms there is no fire, or physical signs of fire.

Weight of Response

If the call challenging process confirms an actual fire, a full fire PDA is mobilised. If the call challenging process cannot verify the cause of the AFA, the OC operator has the discretion to mobilise an appropriate weight of response based on factors such as time of day and premises type.

Exemptions

There are no exemptions to call challenging. The OC operator therefore follows the call challenge process for all AFA calls received, regardless of premises type and caller.

OPTION 5

Non-attendance to all AFA's from non-domestic premises, unless back-up 999 call is received. Exemptions apply to sleeping risk premises types and certain times of day.

Non-attendance

There is no call challenging process on receiving a 999-call stating that an AFA has actuated. The OC operator advises the caller, that they ring-back using 999, if they discover a fire.

Weight of Response

Calls confirming an actual fire, will attract an immediate full fire PDA response.

Exemptions

Sleeping risk premises will be exempt from non-attendance and therefore receive an immediate response based on time of day and premises type. The immediate response to exemptions are as follows:

- Residential Care Homes will receive 2 fire appliances regardless time of day
- All other sleeping risks will receive one fire appliance between 0700 – 1800hrs and two fire appliances out-with these hours.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

While the options appraisal process is an important part of evidence-based planning, it should be emphasised that at this stage of the process, the shortlisted options are still very much broad options and not detailed accounts of how each option for responding to AFA actuations would operate in practice.

There are a great many operational and practical matters to address, most of which will benefit from insights from front line staff, stakeholders, and the public. The workshop you have been invited to, will therefore help us to start thinking about the more detailed aspects, including how any change to our response could be implemented through a carefully planned and managed approach.

After the workshop, the SFRS will continue to develop the options as they progress through each stage of the options appraisal, and we will continue to engage and listen to staff and stakeholders' views, to inform this work.

The detailed assessment and analysis, including scoring and ranking of each option will be considered by the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Board.

Subject to Board approval, we would then plan to publish proposals for public consultation during summer 2021 and make a final decision around the preferred option near the end of 2021.

To start the process of getting insights from staff and stakeholders into our proposals and help prepare for the workshop, we invite you to complete a pre-workshop questionnaire, which should only take five minutes of your time to complete.

**PRE-WORKSHOP
QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please aim to complete this by 19th February 2021

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	MEANING
Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC)	<p>An Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) is a monitoring station, operated by people 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Teams who work in ARCs monitor a range of systems, including fire and intruder alarms, systems for monitoring elderly people, and CCTV cameras.</p> <p>Once an activation signal is sent to a monitoring center, for example a fire alarm being triggered, the monitoring team carefully filter activations to sort which alerts are false alarms and which alarms require emergency services. In the event of a genuine alert, the ARC team contact the relevant emergency services on behalf of their clients.</p>
Break Glass Call Point	<p>Break glass call points enable a person who discovers a fire to operate the fire warning system and immediately raise the alarm to warn other people in the premises. Break glass call points are normally positioned at exit doors.</p>
Fire Service Reform	<p>The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 is an Act of the Scottish Parliament. This legislation merged the eight separate police forces and fire and rescue services in Scotland, plus several central agencies, into single agencies covering the whole of Scotland. These new agencies, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, formally came into being on 1 April 2013.</p>
Operations Control	<p>There are three regional Operation Controls (OC), that handle all SFRS's 999 emergency calls. OC staff have a vital role and are trained to deal with any 999 call that they might receive, from a house fire to a serious road traffic collision or cliff rescue.</p> <p>OC staff help callers identify their exact location, provide fire safety advice to people who might be trapped inside a burning building and continue to reassure callers until firefighters arrive on the scene. They are also trained in dealing with other incidents, including chemical, radiological, biological, and nuclear incidents.</p> <p>When OC staff receive a call, they assess the situation the caller is in and then mobilise a fire engine(s) to the incident. OC staff are then responsible for the needs of the firefighters by dispatching further resources as required, arranging relief crews, liaising with other agencies, and providing important operational information for the duration of each incident.</p>

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<p>Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA)</p>	<p>The incidents SFRS attends can be divided into types - for example, fires, hazardous substances, road traffic collisions etc.</p> <p>For each type of incident, SFRS has agreed in advance what resources will need to be sent, or 'mobilised'. This includes the number of fire engines, specific equipment, and specialist teams. This is called a Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA).</p>
<p>Retained Duty System Firefighter</p>	<p>A Retained Duty System (RDS) Firefighter is a professional firefighter who may have full-time employment outside of the fire service but responds to emergency calls within their local area, as and when required.</p> <p>RDS Firefighters are called upon to deliver the same wide range of emergency services as Wholetime Firefighters, including fires, floods, road traffic accidents, chemical spills and more. They can also be called upon to work with Wholetime Firefighters to promote fire safety messages as well as carrying out free home fire safety visits within their communities.</p> <p>RDS Firefighters require to live or work near to the fire station they serve to enable them to provide an emergency response service for that station from home or place of work at any time of the day or night; normally within 5 – 8 minutes of emergency callouts although this may vary.</p> <p>When required to answer an emergency call, RDS Firefighters are summoned to the fire station by a radio pager. RDS Firefighters are therefore required to live or work near to the fire station they serve. This allows them to respond to emergencies within acceptable and strict attendance time targets set out by each fire service. Typically, retained firefighters are employed in rural areas or large villages or small towns.</p>
<p>Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board</p>	<p>The SFRS Board ensures the effective governance and fiscal management of the SFRS within the context of public service delivery and reform for the benefit of improving the safety and wellbeing of the people of Scotland.</p>
<p>Strategic Leadership Team</p>	<p>Based in Cambuslang, the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) is responsible for delivering the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on behalf of the Board.</p>



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Evaluating Options for Responding to Automatic Fire Alarms

Information Booklet February 2021