

**City of Milwaukee Private Alarm Task Force:
Comments on first 2 meetings by Pinnacle Security Company, Orem, Utah
Submitted March 23, 2010
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The following are comments that Pinnacle Security would like to be included in the file as it pertains to the deliberations of the Private Alarm Task Force

Customer Permits

Pinnacle agrees that the clear trend in the industry is for cities to require a customer alarm permit. Pinnacle does not oppose the idea of a customer being required to obtain a permit if the policy is sensible and well thought out. Some suggestions to consider while creating a policy include:

- Consideration of a reasonable **grace period** in which to acquire a permit. Perhaps within 30 days of installation.
- Determining the additional resources (**new staff or additional staff time**) the city would need to commit in order to efficiently process these requests.
- Clearly define who (whether the alarm company or the customer) the **responsible party** is for obtaining the permit.
- Fines** for false (unverified) alarms by those without a permit should be charged to the party (either the company or the customer) responsible for obtaining that permit. It would be inconsistent and frustrating to have one party responsible for the permit and the other responsible for the fine.
- Creating a fine schedule that uses **progressive discipline** and is harsher for those who do not ever bother to get a permit. For instance a schedule could fine a properly permitted customer on a schedule such as; first violation- free, 2nd- \$50, 3rd-\$100, etc. Those without a permit would lose the “first one free” privilege and be charged on a first violation if the violation occurs after the allowed grace period for acquiring the permit. This will encourage people to secure permit, much like the DNS property registration program works.
- Customer **permits should be transferable** from one company to the next as long as the customer updates the permits. Perhaps a separate form, or on-line amendment, without the processing fee would be ideal. In other cities customers with an existing system feel that since they already have a permit in place they do not need to get another permit. This has resulted in unnecessary fines from the city.

Technician Training

Much of the discussion thus far has been about the issue of properly or improperly installed alarm systems. Having taken the time to review the records and watch the proceedings of the meetings of the Common Council's Licenses Committee, it is evident that **installations of systems were not a major factor in the convening of this task force**. Very little, if any, discussion among the Aldermen, the License Division, the City Attorney's office and the Milwaukee Police Department dealt with problems related to the improper installations of alarm systems.

If improper installations are a problem in the city perhaps that issue is better taken up through separate action by the Department of Neighborhood Services or the State. It has been Pinnacle's experience in the many markets that we work in that the common formula is for **states to regulate licensing (alarm agents) and training (NTS 1, etc.) while cities consider customer permitting, and permitting sales people to go door-to-door**. Perhaps the Task Force could take this framework under consideration.

-With the above being said, Pinnacle does not oppose the requirement for an NTS 1 training course although it is our experience that only a handful of cities require NTS 1 for technicians (such as Wichita, St. Louis) and approximately a dozen states.

License Renewal

Pinnacle is opposed to any renewal process that would unfairly discriminate against out-of-state companies. Customers have a right to the benefits of a competitive environment in the private alarm industry that will drive prices down and increase quality. Creating impediments to out-of-state providers that do not apply to local providers will only result in harming customers.

It is our belief that the **city's application process can be done by mail or e-mail**, including mailing fingerprint cards if necessary. The license can be issued and the alarm agent must present a photo ID in order to pick up the license. This process should be encouraged where there is an absence of written objections or any complaints on file have been resolved prior to the renewal hearing.

Contact between MPD and Alarm Companies

Pinnacle is strongly in favor of a formal notification system that will notify our company of each violation by e-mail on a timely basis. Formalizing the previous MPD system of a periodic phone call will allow alarm companies to immediately rectify any problems and significantly decrease the possibility of repeat violations.

First Responders

It should be understood that the first responder system put in place by the City of Milwaukee already provides customers with a slower police response because of the nature of the verification process. It

should also be noted that requiring additional licenses and fees for first responders will increase their cost and that cost will be passed on to the customer.

We need to recognize then that Milwaukee citizens will be paying more money than alarm users around the country for a service that actually provides a slower response time. This is a very difficult arrangement to justify. At some point, Milwaukee citizens will do a cost benefit analysis and stop getting alarm systems because it will cost more than it is worth. Considering that **studies (a study of Newark, N.J. conducted by Rutgers University) have shown that the increase in private alarm systems actually decreases crime as a whole**, a decrease in private alarm systems will increase property crime in Milwaukee and cause a need for additional police officers. Taken to its extreme, this formula would defeat the purpose of requiring a first responder system. Some cities, like Dallas, have actually abandoned their first responder system and gone back to police response.

If the task force is indeed looking into a system that will recommend permitting each system and a revised fine schedule that accrues to the customer, perhaps we should **reconsider the possibility of returning to the Police Department as first responders**. If the permit fees and projected fine collections can supplement the police department budget it may be worthwhile to examine a change in policy. Ordinances like this are being adopted by cities across the country. It creates a system that is similar to a user fee -the alarm user abusing the privilege of having an alarm system is paying for the additional police staffing needs rather than those costs being borne by the general public.

I hope that the task force will consider our expertise and experience in several markets around the country as a resource in you deliberations.