

ROUGH DRAFT {template} FOR DISCUSSION

City of Milwaukee

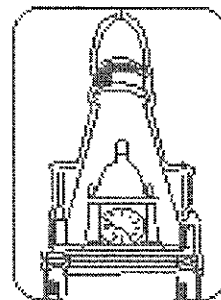
Private Alarm Systems Task Force

Final Report and Recommendations to the

Common Council

June 30, 2010

File # 091421



**City
of
Milwaukee**

[transmittal letter by Alderman Robert Puente, Chair]

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Milwaukee Common Council established the Private Alarm Systems Task Force upon adoption of Resolution File # 091187 on January 5, 2010. A copy of the resolution is attached as appendix A. The resolution provided in part that:

“...the task force is directed to review the regulation of the private alarm service business by the City including sales, installation, entry into servicing contracts, activities related to the servicing of alarm systems and related practices...”

The members appointed to the Private Alarm Systems Task Force (PASTF) were: Ald. Robert Puente, Chair, Willie Hines, Jr. , President of the Common Council, Richard Pfaff, Ann McCarthy, David Stanosz, Raymond Statis and Christopher Utter.

The resolution provided that the task force complete a report and recommendations to the Common Council within 5 months of its first meeting. Following submission of the report and recommendations, the resolution provides that the task force is dissolved.

Background

Section 105-75 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances, entitled, “Private Alarm Systems and Regulations,” provides for the licensing of alarm businesses. Alarm businesses - including sellers, installers and alarm monitors – are licensed for a 2-year period.

Section 105-75 provides regulation of fire alarms in addition to burglar and robbery alarms. The primary focus of the task force was, however, on residential and business burglar alarms and the companies that contract for alarm installation and servicing.

Task Force Meetings and Discussions

The PASTF met in meetings open to the public on February 17, 2010, March 11, 2010, April 15, 2010, April 26, 2010, May ____, 2010, and June ____, 2010. A public hearing was held on June ____, 2010. Minutes of task force meetings are attached at Appendix B.

1. Sales of Alarm Systems

Common Council President Willie Hines, Jr. noted at the first meeting of the task force on February 17, 2010, that an important concern of the Common Council involved alarm system sales practices. Members of the task force noted during several meetings that complaints had been received relating to erroneous information about police response to alarms.

Some alarm companies also use a summertime sales force that includes college students who may not be adequately trained. Customers complain that they do not understand that the police department will not respond to an alarm until the alarm has been verified by either the alarm customer or a private first responder service.

Over the course of several meetings suggestions for improving current sales regulation included:

- Requiring visible picture identification badges for all sales personnel including company name and contact information
- Requiring companies selling systems to provide a list of all sales personnel to the License Division of the Office of the City Clerk
- Requiring licensed alarm companies to submit a detailed plan of operation that includes training of sales personnel
- Providing a brochure for alarm customers and subscribers that includes information about rights and responsibilities
- Revising the ordinances to provide that an alternative penalty to revocation or nonrenewal of a license could be suspension of future sales while permitting the continued servicing of previously installed systems

2. Alarm System Installations

A small portion of unverified or false alarms may be the result of faulty installation. Faulty installation of an alarm system may also result in failure to provide a warning when an unauthorized entry to a residence or business is in progress. Currently, the installation of an electrical alarm system requires a City permit. The installer currently must have Type C electrician certification. Homeowners who install their own systems may not be aware of permit requirements. It was suggested by task force members and

others that, for routine installation of electric alarm systems, the installer could be certified in what is referred to as an NTS-Level 1 certification or its equivalent.

It was suggested that a testing period of 7 to 10 days be established for newly installed systems prior to full activation of a system.

3. Alarm Servicing and Monitoring Contracts

The definition of alarm business in s. 105-75-2-b broadly includes any person engaging in “selling, leasing, renting, installing monitoring, servicing, altering, moving or causing any alarm system to be sold, leased, rented, installed, monitored, serviced or altered...” New regulation of alarm servicing and monitoring activities was not as high a priority for the task force as was the concern about initial sales and installation of systems.

Assuring that any person engaged in one or more of the activities identified in the ordinance is appropriately licensed may provide more opportunities to communicate with a local contact in those situations where the initial contract for sale and servicing involves an out-of-state company.

4. Verified Response and False Alarms

The Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) requested that s. 105-75 be amended to clarify that the prohibition on alarm systems contacting the Milwaukee Police Department by “automatic means” includes “telephone voice contact” when an alarm is unverified.

MPD also suggested that the ordinance should clarify that alarm customers are permitted to engage their own separate security services for the purpose of verified response to an alarm. The ordinance is not clear on this point even for institutions such as banks that routinely hire their own security services.

Some alarm companies have engaged an automated “Multiple Alarm Trip” call system to contact MPD. MPD has found that multiple trip incidents are often unverified and are false alarms. It was suggested that the ordinance be clarified to limit the use of automated calls or contacts in multiple trip situations.

It was further suggested that the ordinance address those situations in which video verification may be permitted.

It was suggested that penalties for unverified alarm calls for service and for false alarms be increased to more closely reflect the costs of police response.

Task Force Recommendations

1. Sales of Alarm Systems

2. Alarm System Installations

3. Alarm Servicing and Monitoring Contracts

4. Verified Response and False Alarms

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