

False fire alarms are costing the UK economy almost £7million every year

2 years ago



Research has revealed that the cost of avoidable fire alarms, such as false alarms, are costing SMEs in the UK £696 million every single year. The figure comes from research conducted by Red Fox, a leading and independent expert in technology and B2B research, commissioned by Hochiki Europe to understand the impact of false fire alarms on UK businesses.

Over 300 SME businesses were asked how much they estimate an evacuation caused by an alarm not caused by an actual fire, cost their organisation and if it had a significant impact. Nine out of ten of these types of alarms resulted in total evacuation of businesses and one in every four caused significant disruption to the business, so much so that on average almost 30% of those unplanned fire incidents are costing £1000 or more in disruptions. This research indicates that when the statistics are broadened out to cover the whole of the UK, false alarms are indeed having a multimillion-pound impact on the economy.

Businesses across a wide range of industries were interviewed, including the hospitality, leisure and travel sectors, retail and ecommerce businesses, financial and insurance arenas, healthcare, manufacturing, public sector and not for profit as well as education. When asked to think about the immediate and obvious financial impact, owners and senior management revealed that these unplanned alarms had far reaching consequences in lost productivity.

Factors included interrupted meetings (33%), staff settling back down to work i.e., chatting and getting drinks etc (32%). For the manufacturing and IT sector over a quarter said the time it takes to get production processes started up again and security systems checks completed as the biggest interruption, whilst in the food and drink sector 10% said preparation processes needing to be restarted with anecdotal evidence also sighting the resulting food wastage as impact that goes beyond financial ramifications.

Not all impact can be measured by numbers so respondents were also asked to describe the impact false alarms have on their business. In hotels guest relations suffered *"All our guests had to leave the building, this ruined their guest experience"*, children's education was impacted *"Teaching was disrupted, pupils and staff had to leave building"* and it would also seem that other emergency systems can also be impacted from some of these false alarms *"The unplanned alarm interrupted the day's work and I had to call out our on-call electricians to come and fix the alarm, which had also knocked out the emergency lighting"*.

64% of respondents believe that most alarms experienced in the past 12 months are false alarms. This is backed up when you look at what respondents said caused the alarms. Aside from the drills, and kitchen incidents, dust and smoke caused from building works and maintenance caused 20% of false alarms followed by equipment failures at 18%, with 12% sited as other causes or not known.

So, with false alarms coming in at over half of the reasons why an alarm is triggered, this may suggest that these buildings are possibly not fitted with fire detection devices or systems that include multi-sensors, which are proven to significantly reduce false alarms triggered by factors that are not a genuine fire.

Whilst half of respondents said seeing the alarm in action reassured them that the system works, the scariest figure that the research uncovered was that 56% of business owners or managers said that excessive false alarms mean that staff don't take the alarms seriously enough, leading to alarm fatigue and complacency from staff.

"The associated cost that false alarms are causing UK businesses is staggering, but the fact that false alarms are causing such complacency in staff is really worrying. For businesses who are based in multi-use buildings, or public facing such as hospitality and retail outlets, where whole fire detection systems are shared, false alarms can be a regular occurrence. If your staff are thinking "it's just another false alarm" then you as business owner have a serious problem and this should not be ignored.

False alarms can be caused by several things ranging from lack of maintenance, toast burning or building renovations causing excess dust. The good news is that all these issues can be resolved – multi-sensor technology is constantly evolving to reduce the risk of false alarms and improve fire safety. We would always recommend that the responsible person for the business, and/or the building landlord, work with professional and trusted fire safety experts to investigate the causes of repeat false alarms to get them resolved ensuring the safety of your staff, the public and the future proofing of your business."

Learn more about the survey findings and how you can reduce false alarms in your business [here](#).