



The Montclair Times

False alarms could mean real charges for residents:

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**By ERICA ZARRA
of The Montclair Times**

There are 4,000 incidents each year when Montclair police officers are dispatched to residents homes only to discover that an emergency situation does not exist.

This series of police responses is caused by false alarms, which requires response from public safety personnel.

These responses increase the risk of injury or damage to property, and weaken the overall police protection in a municipality.

False alarms are a problem in many communities, Township Manager Joseph Hartnett said. They cost time and taxpayer money.

As a result, municipal officials are cooperating with the Montclair Police Department to enforce alarm registration, false alarm tracking and billing services for township residences.

This will increase public safety and make better use of our law enforcement, Hartnett said, explaining that although ordinances mandating fines for false alarms of \$50 to \$100 do exist, they have never been implemented by the Police Department.

The law has been on the books, but now were looking for a company to enforce it, the manager said.

The alarm system would track alarm-call responses and maintain a record of those homes already subjected to citations. The township manager and Police Department would then assess repeat offenders with a still-to-be-established graduated schedule of fines.

Our concern is that we do not want an aggressive or harassing policy, Mayor Ed Remsen said. This is about the quality of life, and not revenues.

Though the Montclair Police Department did not provide documentation of the specific figure of annual false alarms to the Township Council, Remsen said he trusts Chief of Police David P. Sabaghs approximation that there are thousands of incidents.

I wanted to know the exact amount as I was surprised at the projection, Remsen said of the estimated \$270,000 the Police Department expects the municipality to receive from the annual revenues this service will generate. These profits will offset the costs incurred by Montclair in responding to false alarms.

When you think about all of the house alarms that you hear go off in your own neighborhood, then the high amount of incidents and need for this [assessment] service makes sense, Remsen said.

The municipality is beginning to strengthen this system. Hartnett intends to contract with a company that will

monitor alarm registrations, track false alarms and handle billing.

The estimated annual cost of this service provider is \$80,000.

As part of the proposed contract, the township would assign a part-time false-alarm coordinator who would spend several hours each month interacting with the hired company, but there will be no other services or facilities provided by Montclair as part of the proposed agreement.

The goal here is to reduce the incidents of false alarms going off, not to make money or be tough on anyone, Remsen said.

Benefits from the proposed service contract include elimination of the need for Montclair to finance the upfront costs to develop and maintain an automated tracking and billing system, in addition to the ongoing administrative expenses to support the registration, tracking and enforcement of the false alarm ordinance.

Hartnett said he just put the contract out to bid and hopes to have the system in place by next year.