



HAMILTON POLICE SERVICE

# DURESS-TYPE ALARMS FALSE ALARM PREVENTION TIPS

Police continue to deal with many false duress-type alarms every day. Currently, under Verified Response Programs, they do not have to be verified but changes may have to be made in order to reduce these types of false alarms.

- ▶ With this type of alarm, many users do not know they have caused a duress-type alarm until they receive their hefty fine.
- ▶ Duress type alarms are one of the highest priority calls at police departments; reducing or eliminating all types of alarms enables police to attend to true emergencies and prevents users from paying pesky false alarm fines.
- ▶ Calling 911 and speaking directly with a professional 911 operator is the best way to quickly reach police; pressing a button on a keypad or app, entering a duress code or pressing a hold-up button delays response and valuable information can be missed as to what is occurring .
- ▶ **Police encourage alarm companies to pass the message along that in the event of an emergency and it is safe to do so, calling 911 directly is the best way to summon police quickly.**

**Below are some of the challenges police departments are facing when it comes to false duress-type alarms as well as some suggestions:**



## ALARM USER ISSUES



### Forgotten Passwords

People often forget passwords; there are just too many to remember nowadays. It is time to move away from using passwords for alarm systems.



### Failure to Report Changes

Keyholder lists and premises phone numbers are not regularly updated by alarm users especially businesses and retail stores, losing the chance to cancel the alarm if it is false.



### Arming and Leaving

Entering the wrong code at the keypad or pressing the panic button when leaving the residence or business **is the cause for most false duress type alarms.** There is usually no answer at the premises when called and if no keyholder is reached, the call is not cancelled and police are dispatched.



### Unsure Users

Alarm users do not know what to do if they make a mistake entering a code.



### Did You Know?

Until Debit cards and ATM's surfaced the average person never used a password. Nowadays it is common to have over 100.



### Did You Know?

Many keypads in use today were around since before 911 was active in Canada, before cell phones and the internet.



### Assuming Existing Alarm System

New users on an existing system in their home or business take over the contract and create new passwords but often do not familiarize themselves fully on the operation of their system.



### Wireless Panic

Users routinely accidentally press panic buttons on FOBs in pockets, lanyards or keychains. Users and children often accidentally press the panic button via an APP on their mobile - pressing a button on an app should involve many steps to prevent accidents.



### Third-Party User on System

After-hour, third-party users on commercial systems like cleaners, bank cash services, parts and food deliveries cause many false duress-type alarms by entering the wrong code. Regular training must be provided by the owners of the alarm system and contact with a keyholder first should be a requirement.



### HOME AND BUSINESS KEYHOLDER LISTS - THE RESPONSIBILITY

So that alarm companies or police can reach a responsible party during emergencies such as alarm events, keyholders should be available by phone 24/7 and should not be turning mobile phones off at night.

**Alarm companies use various 1-800 numbers - be sure the correct number is a contact in keyholder's phone.**



# ALARM COMPANY ISSUES

	Issue	Solution
<b>911 is Best!</b>	Alarm users are taught that when using a duress-type feature on their keypad, FOB or App, the signal goes directly to a 911 call centre. This is not true!	In an emergency and when safe to do so, train users to call 911.
<b>Reversing the Last Two Digits to Create a Silent Duress Signal</b>	Users often mix up the sequence of their password causing a silent duress signal to the monitoring station and often don't know this is an active feature on their system!	In rare cases where alarm users require silent duress capabilities, creating a dedicated code, not reversing the last two digits, is recommended.
<b>Contacts Not Updated</b>	Alarm companies rely on users to update them with changes to premises phone numbers and keyholder contact information.	Alarm companies need to frequently request updated contact information.
<b>Silent Residential Panic Alarms</b>	Residential panic alarms are silent on some keypads when activated.	Keypads should emit an audible siren when panic buttons are activated. To prevent false dispatches, calling the premises or keyholders prior to dispatching police is strongly recommended.
<b>Ongoing Training</b>	Users don't know what to do in the event of causing a panic/duress/hold up alarm in error.	Training by the alarm company needs to be ongoing in this regard <u>especially for retail accounts.</u>
<b>False Alarm Fines</b>	Alarm users are surprised when they receive a false alarm fine and often don't know they caused one.	Alarm companies should routinely advise their customers how to avoid false alarms and what the fine will be if false.
<b>New Alarm System Users</b>	A test period used to be standard for new users but is less common nowadays.	Test periods for new users <u>should be mandatory.</u>
<b>Tracking Alarm Statistics</b>	Alarm companies don't know their own customer's statistics regarding false alarms in order to address recurring issues promptly.	Regular tracking of all false alarm types should be a priority.
<b>Personal Panic FOBs</b>	Panic FOBs of inferior quality or simply broken cause many false panic alarms.	FOBs should be equipped with protective covers or require pressing two-buttons to activate.
<b>HOLD-UP Buttons</b>	Hold-up buttons are accidentally pressed. Installing personal FOBs with exposed buttons under desks instead of standard hubs with recessed buttons.	Hold-up button should not be placed next to other buttons such as door opening buttons. Hold-up buttons should have covers or recessed buttons to prevent accidents.
<b>New Products and New Uses for Traditional Alarms</b>	<i>Not all devices called "alarms" are emergencies police should be called for.</i>	Contact your local, provincial or national police service before assuming police will respond to new types of panic alarm devices, video monitoring situations or standard burglary devices used in unusual ways.

## Advantages to calling 911 vs. using a panic button on a keypad or app

- ▶ Callers speak directly with a highly-trained 911 operator on an emergency line - calls from the alarm company come in on the 'general line'.
- ▶ The call-taker will stay on the phone with the caller until police arrive
- ▶ The call is recorded which is useful for court purposes
- ▶ There are no fines for calling 911 if it turns out to be false
- ▶ Expect faster dispatch time as the alarm company operator is eliminated

## SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT

### SILENT DURESS ALARMS

Dialing 911 directly is the **fastest and most direct way** to reach police in an emergency if capable. In some cases, waiting for the duress situation to de-escalate to call 911 is often recommended. People under duress often forget how to activate the feature on the keypad! Silent duress alarms should only be activated for **very rare** situations and requires **regular training** by the alarm company and alarm users.



## Did You Know?

Prior to 911 being available, citizens called '0' for the operator to reach police. 911 service in Canada was adopted in 1972 with the first call occurring in London, ON in 1974. Nowadays, calling 911 directly is the best way to reach police/fire/ambulance quickly in an emergency.

## DEFINITIONS:

**Duress-type alarms (general term):** panic alarms, duress alarms, hold-up alarms

**Panic alarm:** a button on the keypad usually with a police shield on it, a button on a phone app, a FOB worn around the neck or on a keychain. A signal is sent to the monitoring station. Keypad panics should be audible.

**Duress alarm:** A special code (not the regular arm/disarm code) is entered on the keypad. This type of alarm is silent. A signal is sent to the monitoring station alerting duress.

**Commercial Hold-up:** A special hold-up button is pressed. This is generally a silent alarm with the monitoring station receiving a hold-up signal.