



## WADING RIVER FIRE DISTRICT BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

### *1.13 Statement of Administrative Policy* Alarm Siren Activation

The Board of Fire Commissioners in conjunction with the Chief's Office is providing this explanation and implementation procedure of our Alarm Siren Activation Policy.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

Each year the Wading River Fire Department responds to approximately 1,000 emergency calls for assistance. These calls are classified into two categories: (1) rescue alarms, which includes calls for medical emergencies where only an ambulance response is required and (2) general alarms, which describes all other calls, such as structure fires, motor vehicle accidents, car fires, brush fires, carbon monoxide emergencies, water rescues, etc. Approximately 75 percent of the Department's calls are rescue alarms, the remaining 25 percent are general alarms.

Department members are notified (or activated) for all alarms by several means. The primary notification method is the use of radio pagers, which are issued to each Department member and beep when a call is received and then transmit a voice message that gives the nature and location of the alarm. As a back-up notification mechanism, the Department uses several sirens located in various locations throughout the Fire District that activate and sound for three cycles.

When activating an alarm, the dispatcher may activate the Department using one of two sets of activation tones: (1) rescue tones, which do not activate the sirens, are primarily used to activate rescue alarms, and (2) general tones, which activate the sirens, are used to activate general alarms. Siren activation may be controlled, to a limited extent, by adjusting the protocol for which types of alarms are activated by which set of tones, depending upon the time of day the alarm is received.

Since the Department's responders are volunteers, there are cases when an insufficient number of Department personnel respond immediately following the initial activation of an alarm. When this occurs, dispatchers will reactivate the alarm again at pre-set time intervals to request additional personnel to respond.

#### **Inherent Problems**

And the Need for a Secondary Means of Notification Due to the diverse topography of the Fire District with the many hills, valleys, and varying elevations from one neighborhood to the next there are some

areas where radio pager activation is more reliable than others. There are also other, more abhorrent factors, such as whether phenomena and equipment reliability, which contribute to incomplete and inconsistent alarm activation. While the Fire District continues to work to minimize these occurrences, there are still instances where Department members report not receiving alarm activation notification on their pagers.

To address these inherent alarm-activation problems, and to ensure a reliable emergency response, the Fire District employs a secondary means of alarm notification in the form of alarm sirens.

### **Siren Considerations**

The Fire District is aware of the effect that sirens have on the community, especially the effect on the residents living in close proximity to the sirens. To minimize these effects and to address the concerns of the residents, the Fire District has labored to find a suitable balance between keeping siren decibel level to a practical minimum, locating sirens in remote, non-residential locations whenever feasible, scheduling limited siren activation during the night, and, all the while, ensuring that the sirens continue to perform their function as a secondary means of adequately alerting the Fire Department volunteers that an alarm has been activated.

### **Secondary Benefits**

In addition to serving as a back-up means of activating the Department, sirens provide several other valuable functions.

When drivers hear the sirens sounding, they are reminded that volunteers are responding over the roadways to the firehouses and those drivers may be more likely to look in their rear-view mirror and yield the right of way to the approaching blue lights of emergency responders.

Hearing the town's sirens sound after someone places a call to 911 for emergency assistance provides an assurance to the caller that the call went through and that the Department has been notified and is responding. This confirmation has a positive psychological effect and offers comfort to the caller with the message that help is on the way.

### **Finding a Balance**

The Board recognizes that employing alarm sirens and locating them within the Fire District is not a perfect solution. However, in light of the information outlined herein, the Board affirms this policy to use sirens during alarm activation and feels that this policy is aligned with the Board's charge to provide the best emergency response resources to the community. The Board will work to address any concerns that are brought to its attention in regard to this matter.

As a result of feedback previously received by the Board:

- The alarm sirens no longer automatically sound for night calls between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m.
- The number of cycles the sirens sound for each alarm have been reduced from five to three
- Each cycle duration has been reduced significantly
- The decibel level of the sirens located at each station house has been decreased from that of the previous sirens.

The Board welcomes suggestions, and may amend this policy based on those suggestions, provided that they maintain the best interest of all stakeholders involved.

Send written correspondence regarding this matter to the Wading River Fire District Board of Fire Commissioners, 1503 North Country Road, Wading River, NY 11792.

Adopted by the Wading River Fire District Board of Fire Commissioners on Monday, 02/12/2108.

Thomas Colitti, Chairman  
James Meier, Commissioner  
Glenn Erick, Commissioner  
John McManus, Commissioner  
Michael Harrigan, Commissioner