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CITY OF ATLANTA BUREAU OF POLICE SERVICES THOR PROGRAM FALSE ALARM STUDY MARCH, 1976

TOUCHE ROSS & CO.





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CITY OF ATLANTA -

BUREAU OF POLICE SERVICES

THOR PROGRAM -

FALSE ALARM STUDY

SEP 7 1976

ACQUISITIONS

MARCH, 1976



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14th FLOOR, PEACHTREE CENTER SOUTH 225 PEACHTREE STREET N. E. ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303

March 30, 1976

We have completed our research study of the false alarm problem in the City of Atlanta and are pleased to present you with our

The attached report addresses the objectives and scope of the research study, the methodology employed, our findings and con-

The goal of this research has been to determine the extent, cost and causes of false alarms in the City of Atlanta. We hope that you will find our report both informative and responsive to your needs. Should you have any questions regarding this research study, we will be pleased to meet with you at your convenience.

Very truly yours,

Touche Ron & Co.



I. INTRODUCTION



I. INTRODUCTION

As the threat of crime became a large national problem Federal officials launched a nationwide anti-crime program in 1974. This progra, known as IMPACT, was an ambitious experiment limited to eight cities and attacking specific crimes. Atlanta was selected as one of the eight cities and, consequently, was awarded

The City of Atlanta elected to use some of its funds to establish the Target Hardening-Opportunity Reduction (THOR) unit. The specific objectives regarding the expected decrease in burglary, robbery, and rape. Project THOR was composed of several elements designed to deter criminal acts and aid in the apprehension of criminals.

- Security Surveys which would pinpoint specific action steps which the citizen or businessman could evoke to enhance the physical

- Operation ID which entailed the engraving of the owner's social security number on valuables to reduce the probability of theft and to maximize the likelihood of restoring recovered property

- Emergency Contact System (ECS) which addressed the need for contacting owners or managers of businesses in the event of a burglary. The system utilized a code which preserved the privacy of the owner, yet provided information to the beat officer regarding persons to be contacted, alarm system, etc.

- Organizational Involvement which concerned presentations made to civic, social, and business groups in Atlanta. These presentations drew upon publications, procedures, and film maintained by THOR to communicate crime prevention techniques.

- Research Projects which were designed to provide insights into crime prevention techniques and to aid the ongoing operational elements of THOR. The projects included research in the areas of security device standards, burglary insurance premiums, false

This report represents one of the research efforts conducted by



TOUCHE ROSS & CO.

(I. Introduction)

The number of false alarms received by the Atlanta Bureau of Police Services (BPS) has grown dramatically in recent years and has become a subject of considerable discussion.¹ As the volume of false alarms increases, the amount of police time spent responding to alarms also increases and becomes an activity which the BPS wishes to quantify.

The increase in false alarms can be explained in part by a growth in the number of burglar alarm and security companies. Nationally, the number of alarm company stations for multiple clients has expanded from less than 170 in 1961 to 310 in 1973, an increase of more than 82% over that twelve-year period.² An analysis of records of alarm company permits issued in Atlanta reveals that there were 35 such concerns in 1972 and 70 in 1975, an increase of 100% in three years. One result of the growth in the number of these companies is an increase in the total volume of alarms received by the police. Concurrently, the volume of false alarms has also grown. National statistics indicate that approximately 95% of all alarm signals received by the police are false.³

In an effort to reduce the time spent in responding to false alarms, many municipalities and some states have introduced legislation aimed at setting standards for the sellers and users of burglar alarms and, in general, licensing and regulating the private investigative and private industry. 4

- 1974, p.6.
- Analysis, September 1973.
- Police Chief, September 1974.

¹ There is no universally accepted definition of the term "false alarm", and interpretations vary between police departments and burglar alarm companies. For the purposes of this report, a false alarm is defined as an burglar alarm signal which is received and responded to by the Bureau and which was not set off by an illegal or unwarranted entry or attempted entry.

² "An Assessment of False Alarms", NBFAA Signal, First Quarter

³ Norman H. Mines, The MITRE Corporation, <u>Burglar Alarm Requirements</u>

⁴ National Crime Prevention Institute Information Center, <u>Report</u> File #887: Alarm Legislation, January 1975; Alarm Industry Committee for Combating Crime, "AICCC False Alarm Study", undated; and Robert J. Cohen, "False Alarm Legislation in Seattle", The



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(I. Introduction)

Background (Cont...)

The alarm industry itself has undertaken studies to develop standards for alarm equipment.⁵ The problem of false alarms has also received attention from the U. S. Department of Justice which, through Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grants, has attempted to define acceptable false alarm levels through such measurement techniques as Mean Time Between False Alarm (MTBFA).⁶

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Because of the growing number of false alarms, the City of Atlanta BPS defined the need for a comprehensive study of the existing situation in hopes of obtaining a more thorough understanding of the possible problem and its solutions. The research study described in this report was prepared for the BPS and sponsored under the auspices of the Target Hardening Opportunity Reduction Program (THOR), funded by an LEAA grant.

⁵"An Assessment of False Alarms". <u>NBFAA Signal</u>, First Quarter 1974; and Tim Willick, "Design for Profitability", SDM, April 1975.

⁶ Norman H. Mines, The MITRE Corporation, <u>Burglar Alarm Requirements</u> Analysis, September 1973.



II, DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT



II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The primary goal of this research study has been to determine the extent, cost and causes of false alarms in the City of Atlanta.

The study of the extent of false alarms centers around a review of the number of burglar alarm signals generated from police and private burglar alarm systems. The purpose of this phase of the research was to estimate the following items:

- Annual number of burglar alarm signals responded to by the BPS.

- Annual number of false alarm signals received.

- Annual number of valid alarm signals received.

- Annual number of arrests made where burglar alarm system

Estimates of the items listed above were prepared by sampling tech-

The analysis of costs of police manpower and equipment resources diverted by false alarms was based on a review of the direct payroll and equipment costs incurred during a sample period of time. This sample was then used to estimate total annual costs of false alarms.

Concurrently with the analyses of the extent and cost of false alarms, an effort was made to identify their causes. This effort included the preparation of a listing of false alarm signals, documentation of signals received during the study period, documentation of sample false alarm signals from security and alarm companies and statistical analysis of the observed causes of false alarms. The data gathered during the study period was used to prepare an estimate of the annual percentage

This research study represents a thorough review of all available publications regarding false alarms, including studies prepared by the burglar alarm industry, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, City of Atlanta BPS and other organizations. A reference listing is included as Appendix A of this report.



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(II. Description of the Project)

Methodology (Cont...)

Interviews were conducted with persons knowledgeable about and concerned with the false alarm problem in the City of Atlanta in order to develop a deeper understanding of the elements and complexities surrounding the problem. A list of individuals interviewed is included as Appendix B of this report.

A review of the existing police dispatching system was made to understand exactly how alarm signals are received, processed, answered and recorded.

Selected alarm installations were visited to assess their use of burglar alarms and to document the reasons for false alarms.

A random sample of over 1,500 false alarms was taken from BPS records and was used to estimate the total annual volume of false and valid burglar alarms and to help define the cost and causes of the alarms. All attempts were made to exclude hold up alarm signal from the sample data base using BPS information recorded on dispatch cards.

Due to the magnitude of records maintainted regarding alarms signals, an observation of each record was deemed impractical. Instead, data was gathered from a two week period in the month of June, that BPS and private alarm company personnel indicated was most representative of the entire year. In gathering data it was necessary to identify a period rather than randomly selecting days from the year in order to have consistency and uniformity of corresponding data between the Bureau of Police Services and private alarm companies. Data taken from another period of the year (Spring, Fall, or Winter) may yield somewhat different results. However, based on the comparison of results with similar studies, the sample obtained appears to be representative, reasonable and appropriate for the purpose of the research study.

An analysis of data provided by burglar alarm and security companies (covering the same time period as the sample described above) was prepared to attest to the reasonableness of the samples' results. This analysis was further used in the study of the causes of false alarms.

The data gathered in accordance with the steps described above was analyzed and compared with results of similar studies prepared in other cities. Following this analysis, findings were summarized, alternative solutions to the problems were evaluated, and a set of recommendations was formulated, as presented in the following sections of this report.



III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS



III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

and conclusions of the extent, cost and causes of false alarms in the City of Atlanta. These findings and conclusions are based primarily on the aforementioned sample of false alarms taken from

BPS is shown in Exhibit A, and highlights the fact that over 98%

whether they originated from a BPS alarm system or a private alarm system. Alarm signals include "signal 2" (silent) and "signal 3"

19.2% are generated from the BPS alarm system and 80.8% are

(incidents where police investigation reveals evidence of burglary

out of 63 signals received, with BPS experiencing one out of 75 and private alarm systems experiencing one out of 60, as shown

	BPS Alarm <u>System</u>	Private Alarm <u>Systems</u>	Both Alarm <u>Systems</u>
mple	301	1,271	1,572
	4	21	25
	.013	.017	.016
	1 in 75	1 in 60	1 in 63



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(III. Findings and Conclusions)

Extent of False Alarms (Cont...)

- the BPS experiences an arrest rate of 0.33% from BPS system alarms, 0.24% from private system alarms, and 0.25% from the combined systems, as shown below:

Total alarm signals in sa Actual incidence of arres in sample

Arrest/alarm signal ratio Frequency of arrests on responding to alarm sig

- total estimated annual false alarms, based on the sample, exceed 37,000, as shown on the following exhibit. Note that of the total estimated alarm signals received, only approximately 608 are valid. Based on the sample, the BPS makes 97 arrests and expends an average of 98 hours of elapsed response time before an arrest is made, as shown in Exhibit B.

- the BPS response time to an alarm signal averages 9.34 minutes, with an average response time to 7.32 minutes for BPS system alarms ans 9.82 minutes for private system alarms. The average elapsed time experienced by the BPS to respond and complete an investigation of an alarm signal is 15.11 minutes, as shown in Exhibit C.

	BPS	Private	Both
	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm
	System	<u>Systems</u>	Systems
ample st	301	1,271	1,572
	1	3	4
	0.33%	0.24%	0.25%
mals	1 to 300	1 in 425	1 in 400

		romania (h. 1)		e					411

EXHIBIT A	
RESEARCH STUDY OF FALSE ALARMS IN ATLANTA	
EXTENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF FALSE ALARMS	

	BPS			lvate	Both		
•	Alarm	System	Alarm	Systems	Alarm	Systems	
		Percent		Percent		Percent	
		of		of		of	
		Total		Total		Total	
	Number	<u>Alarms</u>	Number	Alarms	Number	Alarms	
						· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	

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Number of faise afarms in sample 297 18.89% 1,250 79.52% 1,547 98.41% Number of valid alarms in sample ____4 .25 1.34 1.59 _____21 25 Total number of alarm signals in sample <u>301</u> <u>19.14%</u> <u>1,271</u> 80.86% 100.00% <u>1,572</u>

False Alarm Rate



			11.1	199										
			11 J											
													at Ramo	-
4 ⁷⁷	7.99686	**********		*3 '75'5'4' (A vinder)	* weigenet	S. Presidential State				st symmetry		internet in the second	Transferrer:	(and the second
i, te			÷											

	EXHIB	<u>LT</u> B	
ANNUAL	PROJI	ECTION	OF
ALARM SY	STEMS	PERFO	RMANCE

	BPS Alarm System	Private Alarm Systems	Both Alarm Systems
Number of false alarms in sample Number of valid alarms in sample	297	1,250	1,547
Percent of annual data in sample	4.11%	۲۲ ۲۰ ۲۰	25 / 119
Estimated annual false alarms	7,226	30.414	37 640
Estimated annual valid alarms	96	512	608

9

Alarm/arrest ratio Estimated annual arrests Average response time/alarm Estimated total response time on false alarms (mins.) Estimated total response time on false alarms(hours) Estimated elapsed time on false alarm between arrests

0.24% 0.33% 0.25% 24 73 15.48 mins. 97 13.55 mins. 15.11 mins. 470,736 mins. 97,879 mins. 568,615 mins. 1,631 hrs. 7,846 hrs. 9,477 hrs. 68 107 98



EXHIBIT C

RESEARCH STUDY OF FALSE ALARMS IN ATLANTA

POLICE RESPONSE TIME

 Total Time	Total Elapsed	Total Response	Total Time	Total
Elapsed to	Time for	Time for	Elapsed to	Elapsed
Dispatch	Car Arrival	Car Arrival	Complete Investigation	Time

BPS ALARM SYSTEM

Study Period Actual False Alarm

Signal Time (in minutes) Total Number of False Alarm Signals Average Response Time (in minutes)	4,438 1,547 2.87	10,017 1,547 6.47	14,455 1,547 9.34	8,915 1,547 5.76	23,370 1,547 15.10
BOTH ALARM SYSTEMS Study Period Actual False Alarm				ter de la companya d La companya de la comp	
Signal lime (in minutes) Total Number of False Alarm Signals Average Response Time (in minutes)	3,750 1,250 3.00	8,532 1,250 6.83	12,282 1,250 9.83	7,065 1,250 5.65	19,347 1,250 15.48
PRIVATE ALARM SYSTEM Study Period Actual False Alarm		0 520	10,000		10 0/7
Average Response Time (in minutes)	2.32	5.00	7.32	6.23	13.55
Signal Time (in minutes)	688 207	1,485	2,173	1,850	4,023



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(III. Findings and Conclusions)

Extent of False Alarms (Cont...)

Based on the sample previously discussed and on an analysis of summary findings from the sample, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the extent of false alarms, including the following:

- the national average (98% vs. 95%).
- of police response time.7
- an alarm signal.
- cance of the problem.

Cost of False Alarms

The purpose of this portion of the research study was to determine the costs directly associated with the resources required to respond to false alarms. These costs include the time expended by BPS communication and patrol personnel as well as patrol car operating expenses.

In order to more clearly understand the cost of false alarms, this analysis divides alarm signals into two basic categories: alarm signals from BPS systems and alarm systems from private systems.

Study", undated.

- Atlanta is experiencing a slightly higher false alarm rate than

- The BPS expends an average of 98 hours between each arrest, which is more than twice the average of 48 hours of expended police time before an incidence of arrest as cited in the Alarm Industry Committee for Combating Crime (AICCC) survey of 30,000 elapsed hours

- On the average, the BPS responds to an alarm signal in slightly over nine minutes, which leads to the conclusion that patrol car beats are structured such that they facilitate quick response to

- The facts that the BPS responds to approximately 400 alarm signals between arrests and that only an average of one in 63 signals are valid, lend support to the BPS desire to understand the signifi-

¹ Alarm Industry Committee for Combating Crime, "AICCC False Alarm



total compensation (including fringe benefits) for BPS personnel. This average cost was then extended using the estimated total time expended on false alarms per the sample taken for this research study. The results of this extension are summarized in Exhibit D.

To determine patrol car costs, a sample of 13 patrol cars was randomly selected and an average operating cost per hour was estimated based on seven months of operating data for these cars. This data was then extended using the accumulated operating time (per the sample taken for this research study) to estimate patrol car costs. The results

	BPS	Private	Both
	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm
	System	Systems	Systems
S	7,226	30,414	37,640
	\$2.909	\$1,853	\$2.0559
se alarms	\$21,020	\$56,357	\$77,387

an expenditure of 0.35% of the total BPS budget for 1975 of

In addition to the quantifiable costs already addressed, there are other factors which should not be overlooked, including the following:⁸



EХ	HI	BI	T	D
_	_	_	_	_

RESEARCH STUDY OF FALSE ALARMS IN ATLANTA

ANALYSIS	OF	COST	OF	FALSE	ALARMS

			RES	SEARCH STU	DY OF FALSE ALA	RMS IN ATLANTA		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
				ANALYSIS	OF COST OF FAI	SE ALARMS				
	BPS AL	ARM SYSTEM	S		PRIVATE	ALARM SYSTEMS		TOTAL BP	S AND PRIVATE S	SYSTEMS
			Patrol	Total		Patro	ol Total		Patr	:01
	Personnel	Patrol Personnel	Car <u>Costs</u>	BPS Costs	<u>Communication</u> <u>Personnel</u>	Patrol Car Personnel Costs	"Private" <u>Costs</u>	Communication Personnel	Patrol Car Personnel Cost	Total
ual time expended during				n Na serie da serie						
ne study period (in nours)(1)	11.47	111.17	111.17		62.50	275.50 275	.50	73.97	386.67 386	5.67
rage hourly cost (2)	\$5.15	\$6.66	\$0.58		\$5.15	\$6.66 \$0	.58	\$5.15	\$6.66 \$0	.58
st of false alarms during the study period	\$59.07	\$740.39	\$64.48	\$863.94	\$321.88	\$1,834.83 \$159	.79 \$2,316.50	\$380.95	\$2,575.22 \$224	.27 \$3,180.4
ber of false alarms luring the study period				297			1,250			1,547

A Designation of the

1,547

 $\mathbf{13}$

during the study period	\$ 2.909	\$ 1.853	\$ 2.0559
Estimated annual false alarms (3)	7,226	30,414	37,640
Estimated annual cost of false alarms (rounded to nearest \$100)	<u>\$21,020</u>	<u>\$56,357</u>	<u>\$77,387</u>

(1) Based on an analysis of communication dispatch cards for the study period.

(2) Based on an analysis of the payroll budget and vehicle maintenance records for the study period.

(3) As shown in Exhibit A.



of traffic accidents during "fast responses" to false alarms

The records of alarm signals from the private alarm systems contain information regarding the cause of each false alarm registered, and the sample taken of these records was used in determining the causes of false alarms in Atlanta. The BPS does not maintain data on spe-

which shows that an estimated 47% of false alarms are subscriber related, 17% are equipment related, 8% are transmission related, and

When the breakdown shown in Exhibit E is applied to the estimated annual false alarms per Exhibit A, the following breakdown of false

Estimated False Alarms

17,	691
6,	399
3,	011
10,	539
37,	640



EXHIBIT E

CAUSES OF FALSE ALARMS

	<u>Percent</u>
building properly ps alarm	10% 3
r entry alarm	$\begin{array}{r} 4\\13\\\underline{17}\\47\end{array}$
	1
ystem	<u>11</u> 17
normal course	3

15

5

1

<u>27</u> <u>28</u>

<u>100%</u>



Human error is apparently the primary contributing factor causing false alarms, which suggests the need for continued education of

· • • · · · · ·

The volume of false alarms categorized as "unidentified" in Exhibit E suggests a need for more precise detection measurement capabilities. Similarly, the amount of false alarms that are caused by equipment problems implies that greater emphasis should be placed on alarm equipment standards and on the training of alarm installation and

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The BPS should consider the benefits of creating a committee comprised of representatives of the BPS, private burglar alarm and security companies and other interested parties with the objective of setting standards in the following areas:

- subscriber education
- equipment components
- training of alarm installation and service personnel
- burglar alarm and security company operations

After setting the standards, the committee should endeavor to ensure that they are maintained, either by its own efforts or through legislative measures.

The BPS should install an information system in order to record pertinent data regarding all alarm units installed in Atlanta. The purpose of this system is to facilitate an accurate assessment of performance of all alarm units as well as to provide supporting data to help establish standards for alarm units.

The BPS should adopt the practice of periodically preparing reports on false alarms based on data available on BPS files regarding the extent, cost and cause of false alarms. When the BPS fully understands these components of the problem, it will be able to effectively define a strategy aimed at the reduction of false alarms.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH STUDY OF FALSE ALARMS IN ATLANTA

LIST OF SELECTED WORKS CONSULTED

Alarm Committee. Model Burglar and Hold-up Alarm Business Licensing Statute (Tentative Draft). The National Private Security Ad-

Alarm Industry Committee for Combating Crime. Survey of Legislation

Alarm Industry Committee for Combating Crime, "AICCC False Alarm

"An Assessment of False Alarms". NBFAA Signal, First Quarter 1974,

Brown, James W. "Burglar Alarm Regulation by the State of Texas" NBFAA Signal, First Quarter 1975, pp. 57-58.

Cohen, Robert J. "False Alarm Legislation in Seattle", The Police

Dufour, William de, The MITRE Corporation, Widespread Burglar Alarm Use -- Implications for the Police Community and the Alarm

Kellem, Carl, Alarm Legislation -- The Objectives and The Means.

Legal Research Division, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Inc. "Model Burglar and Hold-up Alarm Systems Ordinance". Law Enforcement Legislative Research Digest, 1973.

Mines, Norman H., The MITRE Corporation, Burglar Alarm Requirements Analysis, prepared for National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U. S. Department of Justice, September 1973.

National Crime Prevention Institute Information Center, Report File

APPENDIX A (continued)

1.15

RESEARCH STUDY OF FALSE ALARMS IN ATLANTA

LIST OF SELECTED WORKS CONSULTED

Enforcement Assistance Administration, U. S. Department of Justice. Installation, Test and Evaluation of a Large-Scale Burglar Alarm System for a Municipal Police Department.

Attorney General Building Security Commission, January 1973.

TOUCHE ROSS & CO. APPENDIX B RESEARCH STUDY OF FALSE ALARMS IN ATLANTA PERSONS INTERVIEWED DURING THE STUDY Name Company/Agency Michael Terry Crime Analysis Team Kent Ryan Crime Analysis Team Keith Collier Crime Analysis Team Maj. D.M. Edwards Planning and Research, BPS John Manfield William Silvia Operations Manager Wells Fargo Alarm Service Arthur O. Gunter Vice President and Gen. Mgr. President Eugene Liles Operations Manager Carl Kellam Lt. G.E. Hammonds Capt. Julian Spense . . Lt. W.B. Shannon Fiscal Section, BPS . Grace Sergeant 10

Service Second

Department of Criminal Justice Georgia State University

Southern Burglar Alarm Co. Greater Atlanta Alarm Assoc.

American District Telegraph Co.

National Crime Prevention Institute University of Louisville

Communications Section, BPS

Data Processing Department, BPS