

PREVENTING NUISANCE ALARMS

Nuisance/preventable alarms are disruptive to the teaching and research mission of the University and contribute to a dangerous complacency in occupants, who may be slower to evacuate in an actual emergency. Many jurisdictions assess fines when a building has multiple preventable alarms. There are a number of safeguards that can prevent or lessen the number of nuisance alarms. This focus sheet helps building coordinators deal with prevention of nuisance alarms in office, residential and teaching environments.

COOKING

[Unattended and improper cooking](#) is the number one cause of preventable alarms on campus. Here are some tips to remember:

- Keep an eye on your food while cooking, even in the microwave. A number of incidents have occurred when the timer was set incorrectly.
- Keep cooking equipment clean. Remove debris and clean up spills prior to reusing toasters, microwaves, stoves and ovens.
- Remember to turn on fans and hood ventilation systems when available.
- Look for smoke detectors before placing moveable cooking equipment such as toasters, popcorn machines, hot plates and waffle irons. Locate these appliances as far away from detectors as possible.

BEAM DETECTORS

Some campus buildings, including the Husky Union Building (HUB), Mary Gates Hall, Electrical Engineering, Engineering Library, Paccar Hall, Smith Hall, Gould Hall and Gates Law Library have detection systems that emit a beam across open areas to a special detector. When the beam is disrupted, the detector may read the disruption as smoke.

These types of systems can be set off by objects moving in the path of the beam, including people, animals and even balloons. If your building has this type of system take extra precautions to warn visitors from accidentally tripping the system.

SMOKE AND FOG MACHINES

Machines used for special effects are likely to activate smoke detectors and require careful coordination. Contact EH&S at 206.616.5530 if you plan to use these devices.

MALICIOUS ACTIVATIONS

Manual fire alarm pull stations can be used in an emergency to activate the fire alarm system and evacuate a building. However, sometimes these pull stations are activated when there is no emergency as a prank or an honest mistake.

If your building has had problems with unwanted activations, a special cover can be mounted around the pull station that emits a local alarm, audible in the surrounding area but not throughout the building.

The local alarm will stop sounding as soon as the cover is put back into position. If you are interested in trying this type of device, contact EH&S at 206.616.5530 and we can provide a



Figure 1 Photo of a pull station cover

CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

Activities such as painting, power washing, and other tasks that produce dust can cause false alarms. Information on prevention of [false alarms during construction](#) and building maintenance can be found on the EH&S website.

Contact EH&S at 206-543-7262 or ehsdept@uw.edu for more information