



# AGENDA REPORT



**TO:** Honorable Mayor and  
members of the City Council

**FROM:** Councilmember Kaplan  
At-Large District

**SUBJECT:** Adopting Verified  
Response

**DATE:** February 15, 2024

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## RECOMMENDATION

Councilmember Kaplan recommends that the City Council adopt an ordinance.

**ORDINANCE AMENDING OAKLAND MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 8.02 (BURGLAR ALARM SYSTEMS) TO (1) REQUIRE ALL NEW ALARM INSTALLATIONS TO BE VERIFIED RESPONSE ALARM SYSTEMS; (2) PROHIBIT ALARM BUSINESSES FROM MAKING DISPATCH REQUESTS BASED ON NON-VERIFIED ALARMS; AND (3) IMPOSE CIVIL PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS; AND ADOPTING CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT EXEMPTION**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Verified Response System mandates private alarm companies to verify that a crime is indeed taking place before contacting the police. This places the responsibility and cost on the alarm companies to ensure their equipment works correctly as intended. Excessive false alarms unduly burden the Oakland Police Department's law enforcement resources. Adopting these amendments will redirect the Oakland Police Department's resources from responding to false alarms to more critical matters, ultimately contributing to a safer and more secure community.

The City of Oakland (hereinafter "The City") regulates security alarm companies to prevent false alarms from reducing the availability of police services for the public. Additionally, the regulation aims to avoid penalizing residents who cannot afford or choose not to use security alarm systems.

A Verified Response System intends to foster and promote the health, safety, and welfare of the public, not to protect individuals or create (or otherwise establish or designate) any particular class or group of persons who will or should be significantly benefited by the terms of this Chapter. The ordinance places no duties on The City. Compliance and liability fall solely on those responsible for security alarm systems.

Public Safety Committee  
February 27, 2024

## **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

A Verified Response system mandates an alarm system to confirm that an alarm activation is not accidental. This confirmation can be obtained by sound, video, a manually activated panic button, or an eyewitness account indicating that a crime is occurring. When an alarm is verified, it is considered a "verified" response. Verification can also be done when an alarm company agent, property owner, or witness at the activation scene confirms that police are needed because a crime has occurred.

Excessive false alarms unduly burden law enforcement, impacting resources. A conventional alarm system can only sense motion and cannot detect criminal intent. It can only report human error, system malfunctions, and unusual conditions, most of which are not related to any criminal activity.

False alarms draining law enforcement resources is a nationwide issue. Oakland is not an exception in proposing a practical solution for reducing the cost of false alarms on law enforcement resources. For example, cities across the western United States, most notably Las Vegas, collectively shared data indicating that most or nearly 98% of police responses to alarm activations are false alarms. Las Vegas adopted a Verified Response practice to great success. Furthermore, the Las Vegas Deputy Chief of Police, Mike Ault, believes NOT implementing a VR response and shifting the burden of alarm response to law enforcement is illegal as it comes down to contracting with a government entity without a contract. The link to the report can be found [here](#).

In The City, the Public Safety and Services Oversight Commission (SSOC) has helped carve the essential pieces of these proposed amendments. Furthermore, the SSOC has expressed support for a verified response. A statement from the SSOC is attached to this report as Attachment A.

Adopting a Verified Response system is a practical tool to help unburden law enforcement from dispensing critical resources on false alarms. Furthermore, the Verified Response approach is a familiar idea. Cities like the size and with needs like The City have successfully adopted verified response systems. Cities have found verified response an adequate tool that improves law enforcement. Moreover, the SSOC has cited verified responses as an effective tool.

## **ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

A Verified Response has proven an effective law enforcement resource management method in cities across the western United States. The SSOC has also advocated for adopting a verified response system to increase the resources available for public safety matters in law enforcement.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact on the City budget by adopting these amendments. The City of Oakland regulates security alarm companies to prevent false alarms from affecting police services. The goal is to avoid penalizing residents who can't afford or choose not to use security alarm systems.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST**

No public outreach was deemed necessary for this item. Nevertheless, the ordinance was introduced with the aid and insights of the SSOC. The SSOC is a commission made up of members of the public whose specific task is to recommend practices that can enhance public safety.

### **COORDINATION**

The At-Large office has coordinated with the SSOC in drafting these proposed amendments.

### **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

***Economic:*** Adopting these amendments does not impact the City's budget. The City regulates security alarm companies to prevent false alarms from reducing the availability of police services for the public. Additionally, the regulation aims to avoid penalizing residents who cannot afford or choose not to use security alarm systems.

***Environmental:*** Adopting these amendments does not impact the environment.

***Social Equity:*** By adopting these amendments, law enforcement can focus on increasing public safety and utilizing resources more efficiently.

**ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**Councilmember Kaplan recommends that the City Council adopt an**

**ORDINANCE AMENDING OAKLAND MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 8.02 (BURGLAR ALARM SYSTEMS) TO (1) REQUIRE ALL NEW ALARM INSTALLATIONS TO BE VERIFIED RESPONSE ALARM SYSTEMS; (2) PROHIBIT ALARM BUSINESSES FROM MAKING DISPATCH REQUESTS BASED ON NON-VERIFIED ALARMS; AND (3) IMPOSE CIVIL PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS; AND ADOPTING CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT EXEMPTION**

For questions regarding this report, please contact Michael Alvarenga, Legislative Analyst, at [malvarenga@oaklandca.gov](mailto:malvarenga@oaklandca.gov)

**Attachment A – SSOC statement letter**

Respectfully submitted,

Councilmember Rebecca Kaplan  
At-Large District

Prepared by:  
Michael Alvarenga, Legislative Analyst  
Office of Councilmember Rebecca Kaplan

**Date:** 2/14/24

**To:** Council Member Kaplan  
**From:** Omar Farmer, SSOC Chairperson  
**Cc:** Yoana Tchoukleva, SSOC Vice-Chairperson; Felicia Verdin, SSOC Staff; Michael Alvarenga, At Large Legislative Analyst

**Subject:** Verified Response Progress

The Verified Response recommendation was created by retired OPD Deputy Chief Michael Holland in 2021 as part of the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force (RPSTF) process. He also wrote the original burglary ordinance that's being proposed to be updated to reflect a new verified response requirement.

After reaching out and discussing this with him in 2022 the SSOC subsequently adopted it as a recommendation for city council to adopt because it assists in accomplishing one of the primary objectives of the Measure Z ordinance, the SSOC oversees, which is improving 911 response times. As he points out in his RPSTF recommendation #53, 98% of the burglary alarms OPD responds to are false alarms. The time spent on these false alarms equates to 4.5-6.8 annual FTE hours wasted of police officer time.

We look forward to implementing this updated version of the burglary ordinance that's designed to cut down on the hours wasted by OPD so they can spend more time on calls related to gun violence for example. Another objective of the Measure Z ordinance.

For the past two years we also collaborated with the California Alarm Association on this initiative and we appreciate their input. Further, thank you to Council Member Kaplan, for her willingness and determination to complete this project. The SSOC is grateful to everyone for the time and energy spent that's been spent on this initiative.

Kind regards,



Omar Farmer  
SSOC Chairperson