



Time for Change

Reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

Options for Responding to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs)

Summary and Key Messages



Reducing UFAS - Key Messages

1. We believe we could do more to keep the people of Scotland safe by changing how we respond to automatic fire alarms (AFAs), that end up as unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS).
2. AFA systems are designed to provide early warning of fire and save lives, but in the workplace 97% of the calls we receive from them end up as false alarms. We call these UFAS.
3. UFAS make up 31% of all the incidents we attend. This means:
 - We attend almost 30,000 UFAS call-out every year
 - We undertake almost 57,000 unnecessary blue light journeys every year
 - We lose over 64,000 productive hours to UFAS every year
 - Opportunity cost of around £3.5million is lost to the Service every year
4. Due to Covid-19 we reduced our response to AFAs which realised many benefits, namely:
 - Reduction of our blue light journeys by 10,409 (21%)
 - Significant reduction in road risk to firefighters and road users
 - Eliminated over 40,000 potential firefighter and public exposures to the virus
5. We do not have a legal responsibility to respond to AFAs activating in the workplace. It is those with fire safety responsibilities in the building - the duty holder. They should ensure the safe evacuation of people from the building, investigate the cause of the alarm, then notify us if they discover an actual fire.
6. We are only reviewing how we respond to false alarms from AFAs in the workplace:
 - Alarms activated from private homes will not be affected and will receive the full emergency response.
 - Any business/workplace that confirms there is a fire will receive the full emergency response.
7. This public consultation is about how we decide the best response to AFAs, to reduce the burden placed on the Service and partners by UFAS.
8. We are consulting on three options, and we do not have a preferred option.
9. We will continue to work together with staff, communities, partners, and key stakeholders to ensure they have input into our decision. We have listened to our stakeholder's views to reach the three options and will continue to engage through this consultation.



Reducing UFAS - Summary

The case for change

The SFRS must change the way we respond to AFAs, that end up as UFAS.

AFA systems are designed to provide early warning of fire and save lives but in the workplace 97% of the calls received, turn out to be false alarms. UFAS are often caused by factors such as cooking fumes, dust, and lack of maintenance.

UFAS make up 31% of all the incidents we attend – which is 28,479 every year. This is a huge drain on our resources which we cannot sustain.

On average we send nine firefighters and two fire appliances to every UFAS call out. It takes around 15 minutes for firefighters to investigate the cause - from the appliance leaving the station to the cause of the alarm being identified.

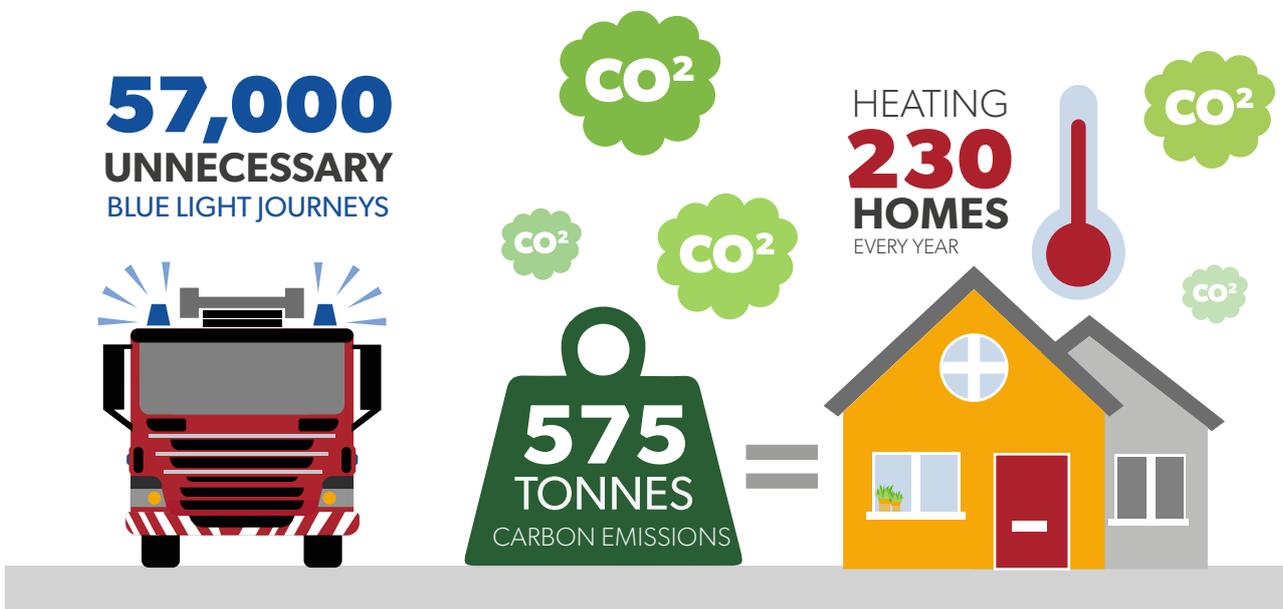
This means every year we lose over 64,000 productive hours. To put this in to context, that's the equivalent cost of £3.5 million (this is what we would describe as an opportunity cost). This causes significant disruption to our training, fire safety and community safety work but crucially, while firefighters are investigating the cause of the alarm, they cannot attend real emergencies.

By undertaking around 57,000 unnecessary blue light journeys every year caused by UFAS, we are not only exposing our firefighters and members of the public to the potential of road risk, but we are also producing around 575 tonnes of carbon emissions into the environment.

The Scottish Government set us a target of reducing UFAS by 15% between 2017 and 2020. But under our current response model this target was unachievable.

We believe we could do much more to keep the people of Scotland safe by changing how we respond to AFAs. Any change we do make will not affect how we respond to calls from AFAs that are real fires. If there is a confirmed fire, we will respond as we normally would for any emergency.

Also, any change will not affect how we respond to alarms in private homes – we are only reviewing how we respond to false alarms in workplaces, that have fire safety responsibilities under the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.



Benefits of reducing UFAS

Reducing UFAS means:

- Our firefighters are available to deal with real emergencies and are less likely to be re-routed from false alarms.
- We can spend more time training and developing our firefighters in more technical areas.
- We can spend more time working with duty holders on measures to prevent AFAs occurring in the first place and to minimise the disruption to businesses.
- We can improve the work/life balance of our retained and volunteer duty staff (RVDS). Each time they respond to an AFA, their primary employer releases them to attend an incident that is often an UFAS.
- We can reduce all unnecessary blue light journeys to significantly reduce road risk to firefighters, road users and pedestrians.
- We can minimise the negative impact upon the environment from our fleet.
- Businesses and services do not have to wait unnecessarily for our attendance to confirm there is no fire and to allow them to resume business operations.

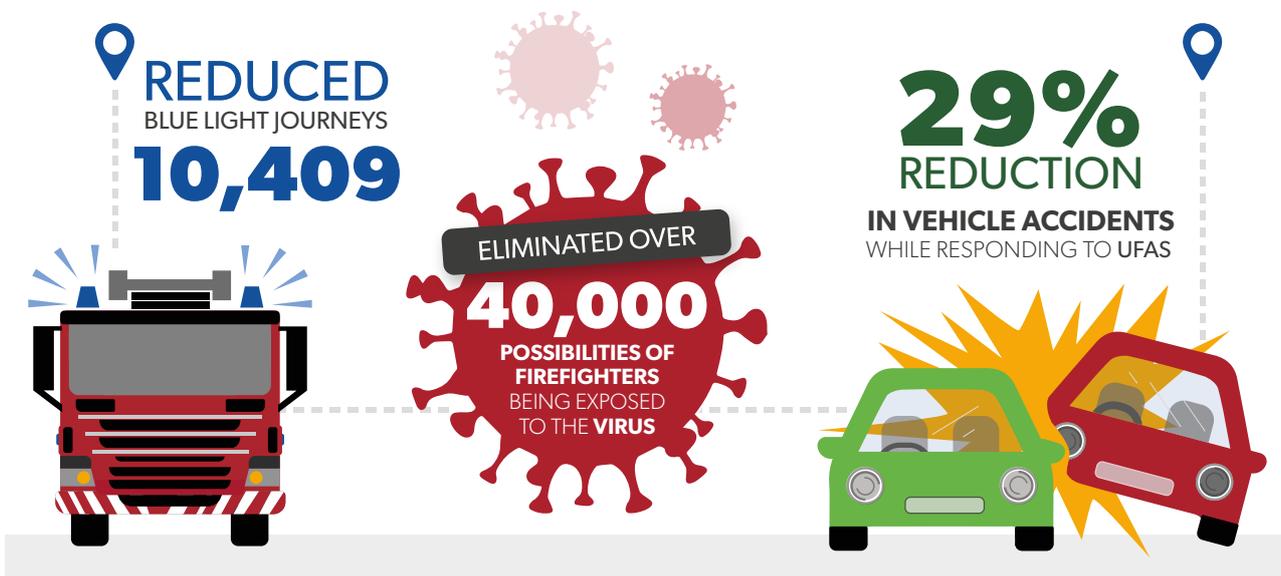
Developing the Options

Impact of Covid 19 – reduced response to UFAS

During the pandemic we had to change our practices to deliver our core emergency service whilst ensuring that we kept our staff and communities safe.

From May 2020, we started sending a single fire appliance and reduced crewing to AFAs of certain property types to minimise the risk of exposure of the virus to our firefighters and members of the public.

This interim arrangement has already realised many benefits. We have reduced our blue light journeys by 10,409 (21%) which has reduced road risk to our firefighters and road users. We have eliminated over 40,000 possibilities of firefighters and members of the public becoming exposed to the virus, based on a minimum crew of four in a responding fire appliance.



UFAS Review

We reviewed the overall impact of the interim Service response in January 2021, and there was no evidence of any negative impact. We asked our staff for their views, with most in favour of the interim arrangement.

We have held discussions with our staff and Scotland's communities on how we can evolve to meet the changing needs which Scotland currently faces, on climate change, increasing terror threat and our ageing population. It is recognised that to meet these needs, we must create additional capacity.

Our staff are asked how we achieve this and their first response is always to reduce our response to UFAS.

Options Appraisal Event

We initially identified fifteen potential options for change. These were then refined further to identify five potential options.

In February 2021 we held an options appraisal event with key stakeholders to assess these five options and identify which of these options we should consult on. Participants identified three options which they felt delivered significant benefits to SFRS and it is these options we are now consulting on.

The full reports from our UFAS review and Option Appraisal process are available on the [SFRS website](#).

Summary of the options for change

This public consultation is about how we decide the best response to AFAs, to reduce the burden placed on the Service and partners by UFAS. The options we are seeking views on are summarised below:

A	Call challenge all AFAs. No response is mobilised if questioning confirms no fire or no signs of fire. Sleeping risk premises are exempt and will receive an automatic response based on premises type and time of day.
B	Call challenge all AFAs. No response is mobilised if questioning confirms no fire or no signs of fire. No exemptions to call challenging apply.
C	Non-attendance to all AFA's, unless back-up 999 call confirming fire or signs of fire is received. Sleeping risk premises are exempt and will receive a PDA based on premises type and time of day.

We must emphasise that we do not have a preferred option.

Each of the options we are consulting on will deliver significant UFAS reductions. The associated benefits need to be considered alongside the potential risks and mitigations for limiting them, all of which are detailed in our consultation document.

Our '[Time for Change – Reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals - Consultation on Options for Responding to Automatic Fire Alarms](#)' document sets out why we need to change, the potential options for doing so, the process we will follow and how you can get involved in shaping this decision.

The outcomes of this consultation will allow the SFRS Board to make a final decision near the end of 2021.

How to participate

We would like to encourage everyone to participate and share their views on the options for changing our response to UFAS incidents.

An online survey can be accessed from our website:

www.firescotland.gov.uk

Responses can also be emailed to SFRS:

UFASConsultation@firescotland.gov.uk

By post:

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