



Louisiana State Fire Marshal
FIRE ALARM CENTRAL STATION MEMO

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Plan Review Staff, Inspection Staff, Licensing Division, Architects, Engineers and Fire Alarm Contractors

FROM: Jerry W. Jones Deputy Assistant Secretary/Chief Architect

RE: Central Station Signaling System Fire Alarm Submittals

DATE: May 5, 1998

This office has recently been made aware that there are a number of fire alarm systems submitted to this office indicating the Emergency Forces Notification System is a central station signaling system which does not comply with the specific requirements of NFPA 72 pertaining to central station signaling systems. As most of you are aware, NFPA 72 offers a number of methods for Emergency Forces Notification/Offsite monitoring of fire alarm systems. In fact, the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code periodically requires certain occupancies to be provided with Emergency Forces Notification. This requirement can be satisfied in a number of ways. The Life Safety Code identifies four options for satisfying this requirement; an auxiliary alarm system, a central station connection, a proprietary system, or a remote station connection. NFPA 72 has specific requirements for these different types of supervising station fire alarm systems. When an application is received by this office indicating a particular type of signaling system, this office expects and must require that signaling system to comply with the requirements of NFPA 72.

As previously stated, this office has received a number of projects submitted indicating that a central station signaling system is provided. However, a number of those systems do not comply with the specific requirements of NFPA 72 pertaining to central station signaling systems. We are not sure if the applications have been filled out incorrectly, or the industry is not familiar with the specific requirements pertaining to central station signaling systems or this office has been deliberately misled. Why would one choose to mislead the Office of the State Fire Marshal, Code Enforcement and Building Safety in this way? One reason is the fact that a remote station signaling system must be provided with 60 hours of battery backup while a central station signaling system is only required to be provided with 24 hours of backup. Therefore, if one can indicate that the signaling system is a central station signaling system, and in affect slip it by this office, they can reduce their battery costs, providing only 24 hours of backup rather than 60 hours of backup specified by NFPA 72.

A number of projects have been submitted indicating that a central station signaling system is provided. The requirements in NFPA 72 are specific. A central station service consists of eight distinct elements; installation, testing, maintenance and runner service are based at the protected premises. Management or operation of the system, monitoring the signals from the protected premises, retransmission of signals and record keeping are based at the supervising station. A central station may provide all eight elements; a central station may provide the four elements at the supervising station and subcontract one or more of the four elements at the protected premises; a listed fire alarm service (local company) may provide the four elements at the protected premises and subcontract the supervising station duties to a central station. If the listed fire alarm service (local company) does not provide the runner service, then runner service must be provided by the central station.

Many fire alarm system installers connect protected premises fire alarm systems to a location remote from the protected premises that monitor signals. Relatively few such arrangements meet the requirements of Section 4-2 of NFPA 72 and should not be called "Central Station Service". Only service that incorporates all eight elements of central station service provided by listed alarm service providers who design, specify, install, test, maintain and use the system in accordance with the requirements of Section 4-2 should be called "Central Station Service".

A central station signaling system company must be listed and fire alarm systems at local protected premises must be placarded. The specific requirements pertaining to central station signaling systems are identified in Chapter 4 of NFPA 72.

A number of contractors have indicated that the Fire Marshal's Office is changing the rules of the game and did not provide sufficient notification to the fire alarm industry that we were changing. Be advised that this statement is incorrect. The requirements for central station alarm signaling systems are identified in NFPA 72. It appears that this office has failed to pick up on the fact that a number of projects which were identified as central station alarm signaling systems, in fact were something other than a central station system; probably a remote station signaling system.

The fact that installers connect protected premises fire alarm systems to a listed central station which is identified as such in the Underwriters Laboratories Directory does not necessarily mean that the offsite monitoring is a central station alarm signaling system. If all of the eight elements pertaining to central station systems are not provided, then this office has no recourse but to consider that offsite monitoring as a remote station signaling system thereby requiring 60 hours of battery backup. The requirements enforced by this office are not "what you can slip by the Fire Marshal's Office". The requirements are identified in the adopted codes, rules and regulations enforced by this office. We have not in mid stream changed the rules. The rules have been identified in NFPA 72 for some time. It may be that our enforcement of the requirements of NFPA 72 have been lax. The fact that we failed to cite something in a review does not relieve anyone of their responsibility to comply with the code. Therefore, as we find these failures to comply, we are legally, morally and ethically required to correct our failures. We have to believe that a number of companies did, in fact, realize that when the form was filled out indicating central station signaling system that they, in fact, knew that a true central station signaling system, in conformance of all the requirements of NFPA 72, was not provided. These companies knew that we would not likely pick up on the fact that the proposed alarm signaling system did not comply with all the requirements for central station alarm service and then went ahead and provided battery calculations indicating only 24 hours of battery backup.

Be advised that this office has corrected its shortcomings with regard to central station alarm systems and will now require specific compliance with the requirements of NFPA 72. This will require greater documentations with respect to central station signaling systems.

If signals are being transmitted to a central station "Monitoring Company", then the submittal shall also include the listed company that will provide the runner service, maintenance service and certificate the system as required by 72:4-3.2.3.1 (full service company or fire alarm service/local company).

Please note that the listed company that "certificate" the fire alarm system shall be licensed in the state of Louisiana to install or service a fire alarm system pursuant to LRS 40:1653.

All documentation and contracts shall be made available to the inspector at the final inspection; and the fire alarm system shall be placarded before the final inspection and shall specifically comply with NFPA 72:4-3.2.3.2.2 for specifications of the placard.

Those companies that are not familiar with the differences between central station alarm signaling systems and local protective signal systems will need to review the requirements of NFPA 72. This office intends to enforce, equally and fairly, the requirements of the adopted fire and life safety laws, codes, rules and regulations.

Jerry Jones
JWJ/adg