

Informal Interpretation Fire Alarm Monitoring Requirements

The Minnesota State Fire Code (MSFC) does not require that most fire alarm systems be monitored by a central station service or that automatic fire department response be initiated. The following are the buildings or situations that require monitoring and automatic FD response:

- Automatic sprinkler systems exceeding 100 sprinklers (20 sprinklers in new buildings),
- Hospitals, nursing homes, hospice facilities, jails, and prisons where occupants are not capable of egress under their own power,
- Certain schools that use an automatic fire alarm system in lieu of fire-rated egress corridors.

An information sheet that we have on fire alarm requirements can be found in the under the Information Sheet section.

The fire alarm system should sound a general evacuation signal within the building, not a supervisory signal. If this is a high-rise building, it is allowed to be zoned to operate on selected floors (typically the floor of origin and 1 or 2 stories above and below).

There is no state fire code requirement that this function of the fire alarm system transmit the signal to a central station (only the sprinkler flow and tamper functions are required to be monitored off-site). The fire alarm system could be re-programmed or re-configured to not send a signal to the central station except for water flow.

We do not like situations where the monitoring company makes a decision as to whether to call the FD or not. It creates too much confusion and inconsistency. It is my opinion that it is preferable that they not even receive a signal as opposed to receiving one and having to make a dispatch / no dispatch decision as I have seen too many situations where calling the property has become the “norm” for central station services even when the protocol should be automatic dispatch (i.e. sprinkler flow, alarms in hospitals, etc.).

We strongly recommend that smoke detectors in ventilation systems and equipment (air handler shut-downs, etc.) be on a supervisory signal, not an alarm signal as they create a large number of false alarms. The air handlers should shut-down upon activation of the smoke detector but no general fire alarm evacuation notification should occur.

Note: Information provided is based on the MN State Fire Code. In some cases, a municipality may have adopted a local ordinance requiring central station monitoring of alarms. In addition, some insurance companies require monitoring as part of their insurance policy or to receive certain premium discounts.