Agenda No

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee	**Cabinet**
Date of Committee	**12th January 2006**
Report Title	**Amended Policy for the Mobilising of Fire Engines to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) Signals and the reduction of Unwanted Fire Alarm Calls**
Summary	A risk assessment strategy to change fire engine mobilising arrangements to Automatic Fire Alarm activations to achieve a more flexible approach and reduce the number of Unwanted Fire Alarm Calls.
For further information please contact:	Trevor Brice Deputy County Fire Officer Tel: 01926 423231 trevorbrice@warwickshire.gov.uk Richard Buxton Fire Safety Support Manager Tel: 01926 410800 ***richardbuxton@warwicskhire.gov.uk***
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?	No
Background papers	WFRS Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)
Appendices	Appendix 1 : Calls from Alarm Receiving Centres Appendix 3 : Calls for AFA Premises Appendix 3 : Glossary of Terms

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- Details to be specified

Other Committees	☐	.....
Local Member(s)	☐	.....
Other Elected Members	☒	Councillor John Haynes – Report noted. Councillor Dave Shilton – Report noted. Councillor David Booth – A sensible proposal, but this is an emotive issue particularly if it goes wrong. Report to O&S after three months of policy operation and immediately after any adverse incident if it occurs before three months. Councillors John Appleton, Michael Doody and John Wells

Cabinet Member	☒	Councillor Richard Hobbs – Report noted. An explanation of terms is required.
Chief Executive	☐	.....
Legal	☒	Ian Marriott – notification to insurers, and application of policy to Council properties and vulnerable groups.
Finance	☒	Oliver Winters – Report noted.
Other Chief Officers	☐	.....
District Councils	☐	.....
Health Authority	☐	.....
Police	☐	.....
Other Bodies/Individuals	☐	.....

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS: Details to be specified

Further consideration by this Committee	☐	.....
To Council	☐	.....
To Cabinet	☐	.....
To an O & S Committee	☐	.....
To an Area Committee	☐	.....
Further Consultation	☐	.....

Agenda No

Cabinet – 12th January 2006

Amended Policy for the Mobilising of Fire Engines to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) Signals and the reduction of Unwanted Fire Alarm Calls.

Report from the Strategic Director of Community Protection

Recommendation

That Cabinet approves the change to fire engine mobilising arrangements to Automatic Fire Alarm activations to achieve a more flexible approach.

1. Introduction

1.1 Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service attended 5,358 fire related incidents in 2004/05. Of these 2,402 or 45% were found to be caused by unwanted false signals due to faulty or damaged Automatic Fire Detection Systems.

1.2 The response to these types of calls has been to automatically send two or more fire engines to the property immediately without questioning if a fire is present.

1.3 This is a drain on the resources of the Service financially, but more importantly they could affect mobilisation to other incidents, which may involve threat to life. Additionally, there is an unnecessary risk to members of the public, other road users and Service personnel when fire engines are being driven to incidents under 'blue light' conditions, which turn out to be a false alarm.

1.4 These disruptions also reduce the ability of firefighters to carry out fire prevention and reductionwork within the community.

1.5 This new policy approach will allow Fire Control staff to risk assess the validity of calls made purely due to the actuation of an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) and to ascertain whether a fire is present before dispatching the necessary fire engines.

2. Background

2.1 Nationally and locally, the percentage of unwanted fire signals from AFA's as compared to the overall total of emergency calls received is very high. As a result, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in conjunction with the British Fire Protection Systems Association (BFPSA), Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), and Fire and Rescue Services throughout the Country have looked at the problem in detail and published guidance on how to reduce turn outs to false alarms.

2.2 The vast majority of Automatic Fire Alarm systems are very reliable and if serviced and maintained in accordance with British Standards do not cause any unwanted signals. Where a system becomes unreliable however, giving rise to unnecessary emergency response by the Service, a risk assessment approach needs to be followed, which takes into consideration the potential risk to occupiers of a premise if a real fire exists and the risk to firefighters and members of the public due to an emergency attendance of a fire engine under 'blue light' conditions.

2.3 It is therefore proposed to reduce the number of fire engines mobilised to incidents caused by unwanted signals by introducing a policy of risk assessing calls made purely on the basis of an Automatic Fire Alarm Signal without confirmation that a fire exists, and to give advice and guidance on reducing false alarms should they occur.

3. Proposal

3.1 Calls received following AFA actuations can be split into two types. Those received directly from the occupiers of buildings using the 999 system and those received via Remotely Monitored Fire Alarm Centres.

3.2 In both cases, the calls will be risk assessed and where a fire has not been established, the appropriate immediate attendance made.

3.3 **Calls received via Alarm Receiving Centres directly into the Fire and Rescue Service Mobilising Control**

3.3.1 All alarmed premises which are linked to Alarm Receiving Centres will be assigned a unique reference number (URN) by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. The frequency of false alarm calls from these premises will be monitored and the alarm systems classified into three standards of reliability performance:

- Green (performance level 1) – good record of reliability
- Amber (performance level 2) – recent history of unreliability
- Red (performance level 3) – very poor history of unreliability

3.3.2 Each call will then be risk assessed taking into consideration the known standard of reliability of the system and the most appropriate attendance made in accordance with the attached flow chart in Appendix 1.

3.4 **Calls received via the 999 or 112 emergency telephone system following an AFA activation**

3.4.1 Where confirmation of a fire is given by the caller, the full attendance for the building type will be made immediately.

3.4.2 Where direct confirmation of a fire cannot be given, the caller will be asked to confirm that the cause of the alarm is being investigated and to ensure evacuation procedures for the building are taking place.

3.4.3 The call will then be risk assessed taking into consideration the type of building, the time of day and whether the caller is alone. The most appropriate attendance will then be made in accordance with the attached flow chart in Appendix 2.

4. Summary

4.1 The aims of the policy are to :

- Reduce the number of false alarms generated by automatic fire alarm systems by ensuring they are designed, installed, commissioned and maintained to appropriate high standards.
- Improve the fire safety management of potential premises.
- Reduce the impact of false alarms on businesses and commerce.
- Reduce the number of false alarms that are passed to the Service reducing the risk to firefighters and members of the public and reducing disruption to pre-arranged Community Fire Safety visits.
- Follow a risk assessment deployment of emergency resources as appropriate to the perceived risk.
- Reduce the complacency of building users that arise when fire alarm systems repeatedly generate false signals,.

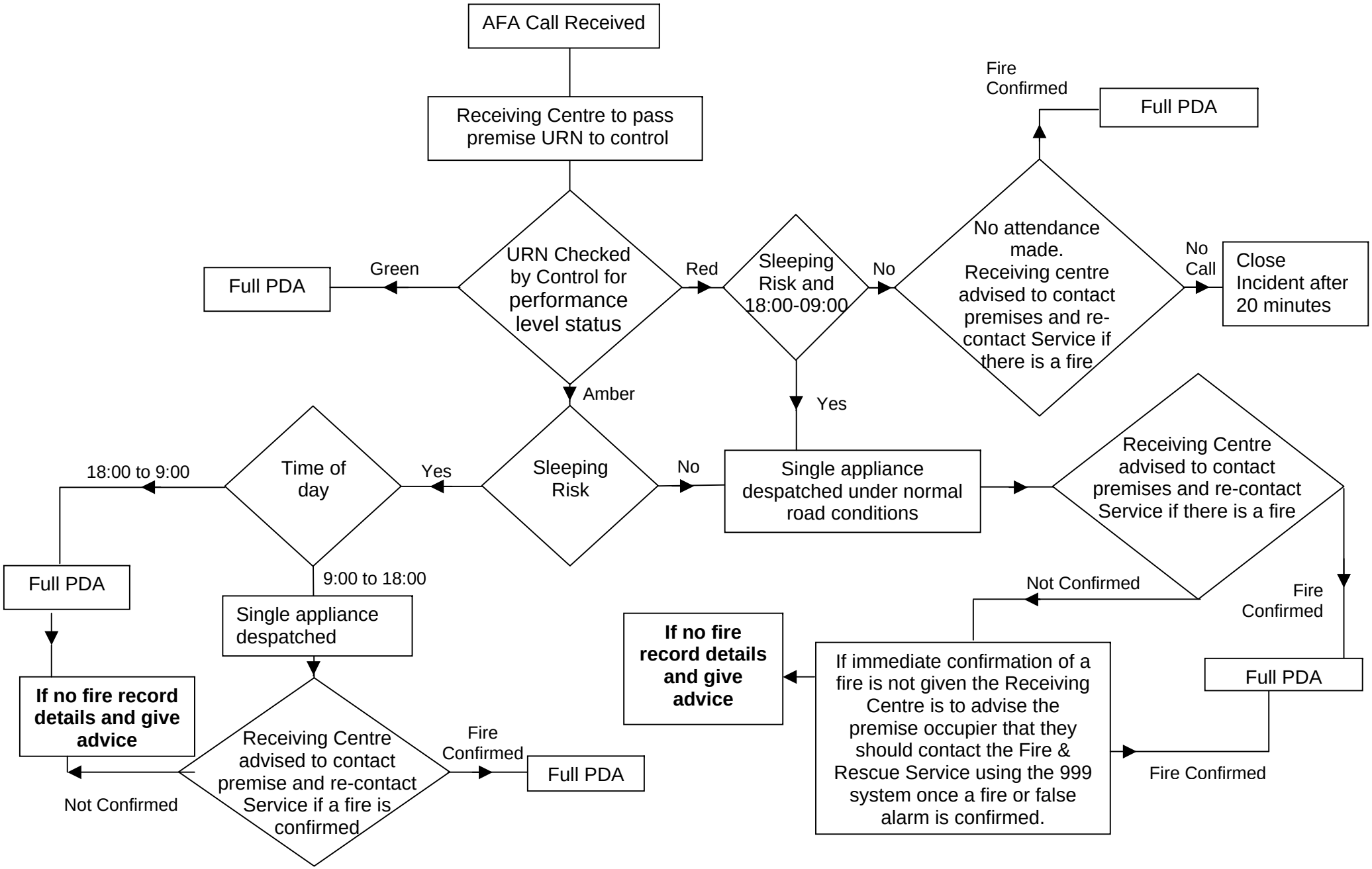
5. Recommendation

5.1 That Cabinet approves the change to fire engine mobilising arrangements to Automatic Fire Alarm activations to achieve a more flexible approach.

WILLIAM BROWN
Strategic Director of Community Protection.
December 2005

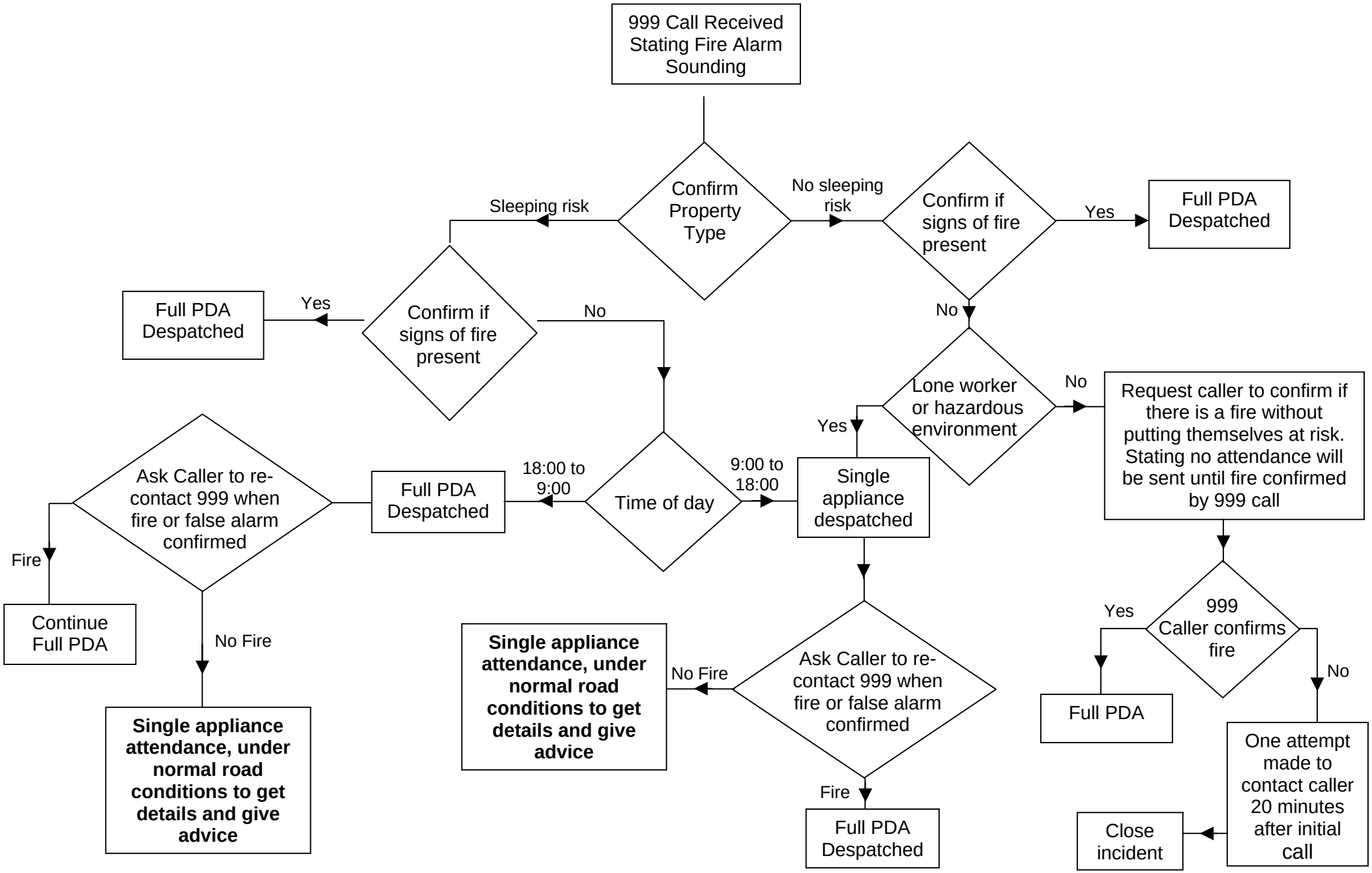
Appendix 1

Calls from Alarm Receiving Centre



Appendix 2

999 Calls for AFA Premises



Appendix 3

Glossary of Terms

AFA - Automatic Fire Alarm.

Attendance - the set attendance i.e. number and type of appliances for each particular risk.

Receiving Centre - Commercial premises receiving automatic fire alarm signals from individual premises.

URN - Unique Reference Number. A unique reference number will be given to each premises fire alarm that is fully compliant, when a call is received by fire control. This number will be given to determine a response, and the Service will only accept calls to fire alarms with a URN.

PDA - Pre Determined Attendance. The number and type of appliances required for each particular risk. For example Kingsbury Oil Terminal will have an enhanced PDA because of the risk, which will include a foam tender and hydraulic platform.

Sleeping Risk - Hospitals, boarding schools, hotels, institutions etc.

Normal Road Conditions – Driving without blue lights and observing speed restrictions.

False Alarm - False alarms in relation to fire alarms are those incidents, which trigger the actuation of the alarm for a number of reasons - dust, insects, poor maintenance etc.