

Monitored Smoke Detection Systems – A Guide for BHI Property Owners

A previous Village communication (read [HERE](#)) explained the importance of having a monitored smoke detection system in residential structures on Bald Head Island. These alarms can cut the response time significantly minimizing the potential threat to life, property, and loss of the island's protected maritime forest.

Village Ordinance Section 6-163 ([HERE](#)) includes requirements for *monitored* smoke detection systems in residential structures that are over 500 square feet in size. Monitored means a *working* system. Most crofters on Bald Head Island are over 500 square feet and are required to be on a monitored smoke detection system. Even if a crofter or garage is not over 500 square feet, if it is used for permanent or temporary storage of any electrically powered vehicle it is required to be on a monitored system.

The Village's ordinance went into effect on January 1, 2009, and applies to all new residential construction and renovated residential structures since that time. If your property is "grandfathered," meaning it was built before the ordinance was in effect, please consider installing a monitored system regardless. The cost savings on insurance can offset the cost of the system in many cases. You do not want to rely on your neighbors to report a fire at our residence when you are away. In many cases, the "neighbor" that reports fires on Bald Head Island are our neighbors in Caswell Beach and Oak Island who can see the flames or smoke from afar. When they see it, it's usually too late.

How Monitored Fire Detection Systems Work

Placement of your fire detectors is important. Since 1999, the North Carolina fire code has required newly constructed one and two-family homes, apartments, condominiums, and townhomes to have a minimum of one 110-volt hard-wired, battery backup smoke detector installed in each sleeping room, outside each sleeping room and on all habitable floor levels. Prior to this (from 1975 -1998) NC code required one and two-family dwellings, apartments, condominiums, and townhomes to have a minimum of one 110-volt hard-wired smoke detector installed outside of each sleeping room(s) and on all habitable floor levels.

When smoke is detected, the fire alarm will sound, and at that same time your detector, which is connected to a 24/7 monitoring center, sends notice of the alarm. The monitoring center then contacts you, if you are not home to verify a fire, the center contacts the BHI Department of Public Safety to respond. These systems are connected 24/7 either through a landline, the internet, or a radio signal.

False Alarms

Property owners may be subject to civil penalties for false alarms. A false alarm is defined as an alarm signal indicating that an entry or other crime was committed or attempted or that a fire or medical emergency exists when evidence indicates, upon inspection after response to the alarm, that the alarm was activated through the owner's negligence or equipment

malfunction within the control of the owner or alarm business operator. False alarms are activations typically set off by cooking and are accidental in nature where there is no fire (ex. smoke from a burning pizza left in the oven or leaving bacon on the stove.).

An alarm signal caused by conditions of nature or other extraordinary circumstances, or equipment malfunction shall not be deemed a false alarm (this is called a “fault” alarm); provided that equipment malfunction must be verified by the alarm company that monitors the alarm or an alarm service technician. Fault alarms are activations due to weather, typically resulting from condensation during humid periods of the summer season affecting the connection, a power drop or surge, or the need for general system maintenance.

False alarms are tracked by the Department of Public Safety. Per Village ordinance (Sec. 16-153) upon the reporting of two false alarms within 12 months from any single address, the director of public safety shall contact the owner by certified mail a notice of malfunction. The notice informs the owner that the department has received two false alarms and contains a warning that the occurrence of additional false alarms to which the public safety shall respond occurring within the next 365 days shall result in a civil penalty. The civil penalty schedule (which ranges from \$50 to \$500 per false alarm) and full ordinance can be viewed [HERE](#).

False and fault alarms result in the Department of Public Safety being dispatched to homes when there is not an emergency. Six (6) public safety officers are dispatched to each call at a cost of approximately \$398 per call. The Village would like to reduce or eliminate these dispatched calls altogether. Below are a few steps you can take to reduce the number of fault calls:

- 1) Make sure your alarm system is functioning properly by getting it routinely inspected. An annual inspection as part of a scheduled maintenance program with your alarm service provider making all necessary repairs and/or recommended system improvements should be taken into consideration.
- 2) Inquire with your alarm service provider for recommendations on the various methods of connectivity for required monitoring services given your current alarm system configuration. An old or outdated alarm system that currently uses a conventional landline connection may be converted for connection through the internet. Radio communicator devices through a cellular-based service provider is another option worth considering.
- 3) Have adequate power surge protection and battery backup for your fire alarm system.
- 4) Change your smoke detector batteries every six (6) months. For more information on smoke detectors please visit the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) website at <http://www.nfpa.org/public-education/by-topic/smoke-alarms>.

Local Service Providers/Installers

If you do not have a monitored smoke detection system, it is strongly suggested that you consider installing one at your Bald Head Island home. A search of security and fire alarm systems installers near Southport, NC brought up the following companies, most of which are located in Wilmington, NC. These are in alphabetical order. Their inclusion is not an endorsement. They either are currently providing service on BHI or have been contacted to verify that they will do so if requested.

- ADT Security Services
- Holmes Security Systems
- Optimum Fire & Security (verified)
- Wolf Security Solutions

Other Service Providers

- Cove
- Frontpoint
- Ring (with an installed FirstAlert Z-Wave Smoke/CO Alarms) & Professional Monitoring versus Self-Monitoring.
- Simplisafe
- Vivint

If you have any questions about the equipment, operation, or installation of these systems, please contact your service provider. If you have questions about what is required in your new or renovated home, please contact our Development Service Director, Stephen Boyett, at sboyett@villagebhi.org or (910) 457-9700 ext. 1004. If you have questions about fire safety and emergency response, please contact the Department of Public Safety at (910) 457-5252 or Captain Swanson at pswanson@villagebhi.org.