

Where's a Cop When You Need One?

*Too often, responding
to a false alarm.*



It is extraordinarily probable that at one time or another, 99% of us have uttered the phrase, "Where's a cop when you need one?" It is also likely that we really didn't invest much thought into the statement. However, the Evermore CID learned of some startling statistics that does offer one explanation to that very question; false alarms. So where is a police officer when you really need one? There is a good chance that one to three of them are responding to a false alarm.

According to Gwinnett County Police Compstat Reporting, the Evermore CID and U.S. 78 has among the lowest incidents of potentially violent/life threatening crime such as murder, rape and aggravated battery in the county. However, the Evermore CID does register as problematic with false security alarms, which is a consistent problem county-wide.

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Annually, the Gwinnett County Police Department receives approximately 38,634 security alert dispatches; security alerts are the leading cause for dispatches and exceeds moving vehicle accidents that accounts for

23,393. What is most alarming about these statistics is that 38,405 of these security alarm dispatches are actually false or non-valid. Of the 9,490 annual security alarm dispatches that occur at the Southside precinct that includes the Evermore district, only 50 of them were valid.

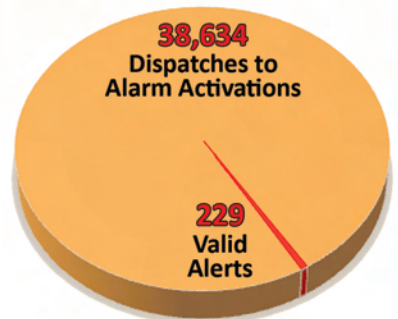
Information from the Snellville Police Department indicates that false security alarms are also a problem for the city's force. Of 2,540 annual security alarm calls, approximately 2% are legitimate, confirms Snellville Police Chief Roy Whitehead. Whitehead adds that the City of Snellville has implemented an ordinance for excessive alarms and issues citations for habitual offenses in an effort to reduce the number of false activations. "National studies show that false alarms represent over 99% of all alarm activations", concludes Chief Whitehead.

The Evermore CID provides additional Security Patrols throughout the business district. Evermore CID Executive Director

Brett Harrell realizes the seriousness of the problem. "False alarms consume an inordinate amount of police officer time and efforts, thereby reducing their patrol presence where it is needed most," says Harrell. "In addition to the reduced presence, there is also a significant economic burden on taxpayers resulting from false alarms," he said.

According to Gwinnett County Police Officials, a false alarm dispatch can require one to three officers to report to the scene. These false alarm calls can take up to two hours of an officer's time, thereby deterring them from regular patrols where an actual crime could occur. Not only do these false alarms increase the threat of crime within the community, they are also serious economic implications that are too easily dismissed by uneducated consumers and the general public.

Police officials confirm that it costs over \$118,000 for every officer staffed by Gwinnett County and of that figure, \$54,422 is an annual recurrence of salary, benefits and payroll tax. When calculating the quantity of staff and field hours required when responding to an alarm call, it costs taxpayers \$58.40 for every dispatch - a number that does not truly reveal the severity of this problem until multiplied by the 38,405 invalid dispatches. Calculations indicate that over \$2.2 million in taxpayer dollars are wasted each year on false alarms.



Executive Director Harrell believes strongly that both businesses and residents have a responsibility to invest the necessary time to learn to properly operate their security systems. "It is our civic obligation to prevent situations that will deter our police officers from doing the important work", advocates Harrell. "We also have to be civically responsible to avoid the misuse and waste of tax payer dollars," he concluded.