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	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Environmental Control Board 200 E. Lexington Street, Suite 100
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL NO. 12-0064 Burglar Alarms - No Fees For User Registrations

CITY of
BALTIMORE

MEMO



TO The Honorable Bernard C. Young
President,
City Council of Baltimore
400 City Hall

DATE: May 16, 2012

The Environmental Control Board (ECB) does support the above Bill, but does suggest further amendments. Lowering the fees will encourage people to register their alarms. Citing citizens after it has been determined that the alarm system has not been registered, does not encourage people to register their alarm system and it makes them frustrated and angry. Most citizens believe the alarms are for their benefit and not for government regulation. ECB recognizes that users¹ failing to register their alarm systems has been a growing problem in the City. The citizen are not aware or appear to be less affected by all the false alarms which take our public safety teams out, which may cause delayed responses to actual emergency situations. The ECB has been forced to contribute a significant amount of time to our limited docket space to this growing problem.

Citing citizens and having them pay fines does not deal with this problem at the root. Encouraging citizen to register their alarms does effectively deal with the root cause of the problem. Eliminating the registration cost will encourage people to register their alarms, even more. Registering the alarms will lower the amount of citations written, which in turn free docket space at the ECB. This will then allow for the ECB to have a faster response time for other citizens who have requested hearings within the jurisdiction of the ECB for other violations equally impacting our city, but not as easily cured.

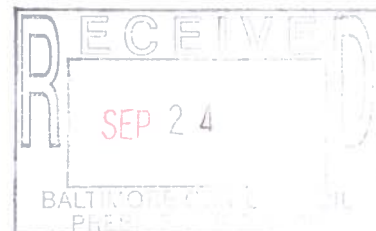
There should be a cost to register an alarm as it does cost the City to keep and maintain a list of registered alarms. The most practical way to maintain a registered list of alarms in the City is to require the contractor² to register the alarms. Obligating the contractor to register the alarms would increase the registration requirement as they should be aware of their own customers.

The cost of registration should not be placed upon the citizen, but upon the contractor. Placing the cost onto the contractor is sensible as they are a partner in public safety. They are a partner in public safety as they are placing alarms within city limits which places a responsibility on police to respond to the installed alarm system. This is in effect profiting from a public service, so it is only reasonable to require them to pay a fee for this partnership.

The method of requiring contractors to register the alarms with the police has some research showing it to be a success. The Department of Justice (DOJ) released a report showing how to reduce the number of false alarms³. In this report the DOJ claims that requiring contractors to register alarms has the benefits of increasing the registration with new alarms. It also greatly

¹ City Code, Article 19 §8-1(J)
² City Code, Article 19 §8-1(D)
³ (Department of Justice, August 2011)

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reduces the contacts police have to make from every user to a few administrators for the contractors.

This approach to registration is based on a model used in the City of Seattle. Seattle's objective was to reduce the amount false alarms in their city. Charging the contractor the registration fees Seattle felt they could use the contractor's expertise to show their customers proper use of an alarm system. The City of Seattle also found that raising fines paid directly by homeowners and businesses does little to reduce the number of false alarms. In addition to charging the contractor registration fees, Seattle also charges the fines to the contractor and requires verification for a burglar alarm. Baltimore City already requires verification of an activated burglar alarm.⁴

After enacting these changes in 2004 they found that false alarms had fallen off dramatically. In 2004 the Seattle Police Department responded to 25,000 alarm calls and that number had fallen to 10,746 in 2010⁵.

The ECB feels as though this approach will increase the amount of registered alarms in the City of Baltimore. The City of Seattle is comparable to Baltimore. Seattle has a population of 608,660 and occupies a space of 83.9 square miles with 308,516 housing units with a homeownership rate of 48.9%⁶. This compares to Baltimore's population of 620,691 and 80.9 square miles which has 296,685 housing units with a homeownership rate of 49.8%⁷.

⁴ City Code Article 19 §8-11

⁵ (Seattle Police Department, 2011)

⁶ (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

⁷ (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)