



## **Fire Alarm Monitoring System**

The City of Crystal Lake, in partnership with Fox Valley Fire and Safety Fire, has implemented a new Fire Alarm Monitoring System for all properties within the City that are currently required to have a fire alarm system. The new system replaces outdated equipment installed and maintained by ADT. The old system required the use of an AT&T telephone circuit line to transmit alarm signals from a property owner's fire alarm panel to alarm monitoring equipment panel located in the City's emergency dispatch center. The new alarm monitoring equipment allows alarm signals to be sent via radio frequencies versus telephone lines.

### **Background**

The City of Crystal Lake is a member of Southeast Emergency Communications Center (SEECOM), which is a 9-1-1 emergency dispatch center that provides emergency dispatch for a number of municipalities in McHenry County. In light of recent advances in alarm monitoring, City staff researched the possibility of migrating to a wireless/radio alarm monitoring system, which is more reliable and a cheaper alternative to transmitting alarm signals than by telephone lines.

The City Council authorized staff to proceed with the development of a Request for Proposal for installation and maintenance of a wireless radio alarm network for the City. The City determined that Fox Valley Fire and Safety best met the City's needs. Fox Valley Fire and Safety is currently providing the same service to the City of Woodstock and Tinley Park.

### **Benefits of the Wireless Radio Alarm System**

- Improved customer service, since owners will work with one provider: Fox Valley Fire and Safety.
- Elimination of trouble in the alarm signal caused by faulty phone lines.
- Easier to detect an alarm signal problem since telephone lines are no longer part of the picture; therefore, isolating the problem will be simpler.
- Reduction of false alarms generated by faulty telephone lines; it is estimated false alarms will be reduced by 25% to 30% based upon the actual experience of those municipalities who have already migrated to a wireless system.
- Reduced cost for providing alarm monitoring.

## **Fees**

Under the current alarm system monitoring arrangement, property owners pay over \$124 per month to AT&T for a phone line and to ADT for monthly monitoring. This \$124 monthly charge for alarm monitoring will be replaced with a fee to be paid to the City of \$80 per month. This will save property owners approximately \$44 a month or \$534 a year in alarm monitoring costs.

It is important to note, property owners are still required to maintain fire alarm systems by a licensed fire alarm contractor. This requires regular inspections, testing and maintenance of your fire alarm system. The radio alarm monitoring system fees do not include costs for maintaining your fire alarm system.

## **Application**

It is important for property owners required to maintain a fire alarm system to fill out the Alarm System Monitoring Application, since the application will initiate the process for the actual installation of the radio device on your premises.

## **What to Expect**

Once the radio is installed and verified in working order, the applicant will be notified of such and encouraged to immediately contact AT&T to disconnect and terminate telephone service for the fire alarm panel. An invoice will be sent to the applicant, beginning the monthly monitoring fee of \$80. The fee will be invoiced and paid on a quarterly basis.

The City and Fox Valley Fire and Safety ask for your assistance in arranging an appropriate time for the technicians to enter your premises and install the radio device.

## **Contacts**

If anyone has any questions regarding the new radio alarm monitoring system, please contact Crystal Lake Fire Prevention Bureau Chief Bob Kohley at 815-356-3640.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

To help you better understand the wireless system and how it impacts you, please see the Frequently Asked Questions section on the next page.



## **Frequently Asked Questions: Radio Fire Alarm Monitoring System**

### **Q: Why did the City decide to update the monitoring equipment?**

The current equipment has been in service for well over 25 years, and since then there has been significant technology advancement with radio devices. Coupled with the recent ability for the City to contract with an alarm monitoring company of its choosing, the City now has the means to provide for a more cost-effective and efficient solution to fire alarm monitoring.

### **Q: Why did the City decide to use radios instead of phone lines?**

The phone lines that carry signals between alarm users and the City were dedicated phone lines that transmitted voltages and not voice or data. This is very old technology that is not well-supported by modern phone companies. These lines also are very susceptible to induced voltages, such as during a thunderstorm, and moisture problems. Many alarm users spend weeks trying to resolve phone issues with their alarm systems.

### **Q: Why is Fox Valley Fire and Safety supplying the equipment?**

When the City decided to change equipment and convert to a new radio technology, the City sent out Requests for Proposals and received three local vendors who deal with this type of equipment. Fox Valley Fire and Safety submitted the best overall proposal.

### **Q: What is SEECOM?**

SEECOM is the 9-1-1- emergency telephone service provided to a number of municipalities within McHenry County. SEECOM provides fire and police dispatching directly for the City of Crystal Lake. SEECOM is located in Crystal Lake. When you call 9-1-1, you are actually speaking with a dispatcher from SEECOM. All fire alarms are directly transmitted to SEECOM for dispatching the appropriate fire rescue personnel.

### **Q: If I pay a fee to Fox Valley Fire and Safety, can I stop paying fees to my current alarm company?**

Not entirely. You are required to maintain your alarm systems and have a service contract with a licensed fire alarm contractor. Fire alarm systems must be regularly inspected, tested and maintained. Your current alarm company provides these services. You may continue to use your

current alarm company; however, if part of the fee you paid your alarm company includes monitoring, you may want to speak with them about adjusting your bill.

**Q: Why did my previous alarm company charge me for monitoring if my fire alarm system was connected already to the City through ADT?**

As a customer service, many alarm companies take care of all aspects of the fire alarm system. The alarm company may take care of paying the monitoring fees as part of the overall maintenance of your system.

**Q: I have a security system that is monitored by a private company. Does the radio fire alarm system affect my security alarm?**

No. The radio alarm network (CLWAN) system is capable of monitoring numerous types of alarms, such as fire or hold-up alarms, then quickly notifying the City's dispatch center of the emergency. The ordinance approved by the City Council allows for the connection of a security system to the radio alarm network.

**Q: I have a fire alarm system that is currently monitored by a private company. Do I have to connect to the city?**

Yes. The Crystal Lake City Code requires all fire alarm signals monitored by a private company to be transmitted to receiving equipment housed by the City of Crystal in the following time frames:

- Systems currently connected to the City's Dispatch center need to convert by March 18, 2011.
- Fire alarm systems monitoring a sprinkler system that are monitored by a central station need to convert on or before March 18, 2013.
- Fire alarm systems monitored by a central station need to convert on or before March 18, 2016.

This is in order to reduce response times and maintain better oversight of fire alarms, it is important to have fire alarms directly connected to the City's dispatch center.

**Q: Can I purchase a radio from another vendor?**

No. The radios located throughout the city will operate as a network, each relying on the other to transmit signals. As radios are added or removed from the network, the system must be rebalanced to provide optimum performance. The system runs most effectively when one vendor oversees it.

**Q: Do other communities use radios?**

Yes. The largest network is in Naperville and has operated smoothly since 2001. Other communities include Northbrook, Hoffman Estates, Highland Park, Lisle/Woodridge, Elmhurst, Wheaton and Woodstock.

**Q: Have there been any problems with the radios?**

Yes. In some cases, a community had problems with their network which was caused because the municipality allowed multiple vendors to install and maintain the radios, which caused the network to operate inefficiently, leading to slow-downs in alarm signal transmissions.

**Q: Our company policy requires our fire alarm to be monitored by a private alarm company or our company has a proprietary fire alarm monitoring system. Are we required to connect to the City?**

Yes. Your fire alarm system is required to be monitored by the City's Dispatch Center. However, your system is allowed to be monitored by a secondary agency.

**Q: What is the charge for monitoring?**

The monthly fee for radio monitoring, which includes leasing the radio, is \$80. For comparison purposes, currently the average monthly charge for a dedicated phone line along with a monthly monitoring cost is \$124. Switching to the wireless monitoring will save approximately \$44 per month.