



Hold up alarms (personal attack)
A guide

1. Introduction

This guide constitutes best industry practice and the BSIA cannot be held liable for any omissions or errors or whether organisations mentioned in this guide do not respond to a HUA activation.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), Police Operational Advice and Security Industry Requirements for Response to Security Systems states (England, Wales & Northern Ireland only):

“A deliberately operated device, known as a HUA (Hold Up Alarm), may be operated to summon urgent police assistance when a person is threatened with immediate personal violence or criminal act.”

Note: *Hold Up Alarms may also be referred to as Personal Attack (PA) alarms for the purposes of this document the term HUA will be used.*

The ACPOS Security Systems Policy 2007 (Scotland only) states: “A personal attack alarm may be operated as part of a security system to summon urgent police assistance when persons within premises are under immediate attack or threatened attack.”

However, in many instances HUAs are used where there is no threat to you or your staff. It is important to realise that without knowing the circumstances under which the HUA has been activated, the police must respond. You should be aware that under both police policies mentioned above, if you use the HUA a small number of times and there is no threat to the person in the defined area, you will lose police response for a period of time.

For the purposes of HUAs, the NPCC requirements for the security industry generally apply to both domestic/residential and commercial premises, unless it is specifically stated otherwise, for example, the use of ‘call back’ as a form of confirmation is only allowed in a domestic/residential scenario (see below for a full explanation).

2. Inappropriate use

Inappropriate use causes false alarms and occurs when staff are not trained in the use of a HUA or visitors to the premises have access to the HUA device and press it out of curiosity or in the mistaken belief that it is for some other purpose unconnected with the alarm system. It is important that the HUA is placed where members of the public and untrained staff cannot have access.

Inappropriate use also occurs where duress codes are used, this is when a member of staff incorrectly enters the duress code instead of the normal set or unset code. To prevent this happening all staff (including cleaning staff) who have access to the codes should be properly trained in the use of duress codes. NPCC requirements for the security industry only allow the use of duress codes on high risk security systems (i.e. alarm systems installed in conformance with BS 7042 or BS EN 50131–1 Grade 4).

3. Intentional, but inappropriate use

The following examples are of intentional, but inappropriate use of a HUA activation:

- a) Garage forecourt attendant when someone has driven off without paying for petrol.
- b) Shopkeeper, because someone leaves the store without paying for goods.
- c) Householder who sees a fight involving a number of people across the street.
- d) Householder who hears a suspicious noise outside.

In each of the above circumstances, users probably believe that they are doing the right thing in operating the HUA device. However, when the police arrive at the scene, the cause is no longer evident e.g. the driver who left without paying for petrol is miles away or the fighting across the street may have stopped. In these circumstances the person who activated the HUA should not have done so, but rather should have telephoned the police and given a complete description of the incident, so that the police response can be suitable for the situation.

Inappropriate or incorrect use of your HUA could cause you to lose your police response. It is strongly advised that you guard against this possibility by using the HUA appropriately.

Only use your HUA if you or your staff are attacked or threatened, or if you believe you or your staff are about to be threatened. If you use your HUA for any other reason you may lose your police response.

4. Intervention (applicable to England, Wales and Northern Ireland only)

If you lose your HUA police response, in order to regain police response, you will need to take action within 6 months to restore police response or your police response will be removed permanently. The options currently available that are stipulated by the police are:

a) Remove police response to the HUA – If you no longer require police response, then cancel it and ensure that no further calls are passed to the police (it is also advised that you consult with your insurance company if the HUA has been removed and was originally installed as an insurance requirement).

b) Install HUA confirmation technology – your security company should carry out an assessment to ensure that a suitable confirmation method is used. The chosen option should be based on your security needs (not commercial reasons) and take into consideration the support systems in place in the premises to ensure that no-one is placed at undue risk. It is advised that you should retain documentary evidence of this assessment.

1. Call-back (domestic/residential premises only) - When you activate your HUA device(s), your HUA is sent to the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) and is responded to by the ARC operator who will then call you at your premises. After you have given your codeword/password, you can then inform the ARC operator of the threat you are under. If you do not provide a valid codeword/password or answer the phone (or if the answer phone cuts in), the ARC operator will still contact the police.

2. Sequential - There are two main forms of Sequential HUA either:

i. A single multi-action device, which requires two (or more) separate deliberate actions to operate, within the confirmation time period; or,

ii. The operation of two or more separate HUA devices within the confirmation time period. Once the Sequential HUA activation signal is sent to your ARC the ARC operator will carry out the appropriate actions.

3. Video - When you activate your HUA device(s), your HUA is sent to the ARC and is responded to by the ARC operator who can then look at the video images from the camera(s) that are connected to your HUA system and carry out the appropriate action.

4. Audio - When you activate your HUA device(s), your HUA is sent to the ARC and is responded to by the ARC operator who can then listen in to the incident at your premises from the audio listening devices connected to your HUA system and carry out the appropriate action.

You should also be aware that you can use a combination of the above methods. For example, a combination of 'Video' and 'Audio' would allow the ARC operator to see and hear the incident and therefore make a more informed decision on response.

It is important that you and your staff fully understand how your sequential HUA devices operate, but also how to ensure inappropriate activation of the devices does not occur as this will count as a HUA false alarm.

The police require action to be taken following excessive false alarms to aid the reduction of inappropriate hold up (or personal attack) calls requesting police attendance, but at the same time ensuring that the police receive more information about the incident before attending and therefore can provide a more appropriate response to the incident.

If you already have confirmation technology and you lose your police response due to excessive false alarms then you will need to investigate why this is still happening and take further action to rectify the problems, before response can be reinstated.

If you are required to take action, then it is important that you discuss your options with your alarm system installer to find the most suitable HUA solution to suit your requirements and threat risk.

5. Further intervention (applicable to England, Wales and Northern Ireland only)

If you lose your HUA police response and you already have a confirmation technology implemented, as described in 4. above, then you will be required to have 90 days clear of false calls before you can apply for reinstatement of your police response.

Additional false police calls resulting in loss of police response following this reinstatement would require an alternative confirmation technology implemented before an application for reinstatement of police response can be made.

If you lose your HUA police response, in order to regain police response, you will need to take action within 6 months to restore police response or the URN allocated to the HUA will be deleted, resulting in no police response to that troublesome HUA system.

Note: losing response on one URN should not affect other URNs that are not troublesome and not reaching their respective false call thresholds.

Please remember: a HUA is there to summon police assistance when you or your staff are threatened or attacked, not for any other purpose.

Further reading

The NPCC Police Operational Advice and Security Industry Requirements for Response to Security Systems may be downloaded at www.policesecuritysystems.com, particular attention is drawn to Appendix T which is the 'Ten Point Plan for Hold up Alarms'.

About the BSIA

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This document was created by the technical groups and committees of the British Security Industry Association (BSIA). The technical groups and committees encourage debate on new developments and concerns within the security industry. In doing so it seeks to ensure that all stakeholder interests are represented including security companies, users, the police, inspectorates and insurers.

As a security company, BSIA membership will raise your company profile and ensure that your business is at the heart of influencing the future of the security industry. You will become part of a unique group of high quality and professional companies which are well-respected and well-represented to government, end users, specifiers, standards and legislative bodies. For more information contact the BSIA.

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For other information please contact:

British Security Industry Association

01905 342 020

info@bsia.co.uk

www.bsia.co.uk