



**Hampshire
& Isle of Wight**
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Information Compliance Team

Headquarters
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Sent by email to:

[REDACTED]

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e. DP@hantsfire.gov.uk
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Date: 24 January 2024

Our Reference: FOI 142 23-24

Enquiries to: Information Compliance Officer

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Dear [REDACTED]

We are writing in respect of your application for the release of information held by the Service, which we received on 22 February 2024. We can confirm that we have now completed our search for the information requested.

You asked:

I am writing to you to enquire about your station alert tones, played when any appliance(s) are mobilised to an incident. Would it be possible to access these tones, whether they are simply audio files or any other format.

Our answer:

Prejudice the effective conduct of Public Affairs

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service (HIWFRS) holds the audio files of our station alert system. However, this information is exempt under Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

As you may be aware, disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act is a release to the public at large. While we are not questioning the motives of the applicant, releasing these audio files would enable people with malicious intent to play them in the vicinity of stations to disrupt the running of the station. The use of the audio files in this way would make it harder to tell whether a turnout alert was a genuine one. Consequently, our staff would

have to check whether the alert was real prior to responding to it. This would delay our response to incidents and disrupt other station activities.

Public Interest Test

For this exemption to apply, the public interest in maintaining these exemptions must outweigh the public interest in disclosing the information.

Public Interest in Disclosure

There are several reasons in favour of disclosure to the public at large as follows:

- it promotes transparency, showing that we have a system capable of effectively alerting staff to the existence of incident.
- it helps people to understand the workings of the station.
- it shows what types of incidents we respond to and what resources we deploy which is of general public interest.

Public Interest Against Disclosure

There are also several reasons against the disclosure of the information as follows:

- the audio files can be used to disrupt our stations' operating activities.
- the malicious use of the files would lead to an increase in the time it the time taken to respond to incidents.
- would mean that each alert would have to be checked, meaning more time would be taken that could be spend on other non-response related activities.

Health and Safety

Further, we are refusing to provide this information on the grounds that it would be likely to endanger the health and safety of individuals, as per sections 38(1) (a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

While we are not questioning the motives of the applicant, a disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act is deemed to be to the world at large. This information can be used to delay our response to incidents. As an emergency service we often have to respond quickly to incidents to be able to save lives. Any impediment to our ability to rapidly depart our stations to attend an incident can, therefore, have serious consequences. The disruption that can be caused by the malicious use of these files would, therefore, be likely to have a significant endangering effect on the health and safety of members of the public.

Further, these files can be used to frustrate and annoy members of staff as part of a harassment campaign, which would negatively impact on our staff's wellbeing and mental health. This in turn could cause increased sickness and additional constrictions on our ability to function as an effective fire and rescue service.

Public Interest Test

For these exemptions to apply, the public interest in maintaining these exemptions must outweigh the public interest in disclosing the information.

Public Interest in Disclosure

There are several reasons in favour of disclosure to the public at large as follows:

- it promotes transparency, showing that we have a system capable of effectively alerting staff to the existence of incident.
- it helps people to understand the workings of the station.
- it shows what types of incidents we respond to and what resources we deploy which is of general public interest.

Public Interest Against Disclosure

There are also significant reasons why providing the information is not in the public interest as it would:

- be likely to endanger the lives of members of the public by increasing the time taken to attend incidents to carry out lifesaving work.
- be likely to be used to negatively impact the wellbeing and mental health of our staff.

Conclusion

Public safety and the ability to deliver an effective response to emergencies are of paramount importance to HIWFRS. Disclosing this information would be likely to compromise our ability to respond to incidents of all types (and engage in other community safety related work) effectively and would endanger the health and safety of those at our stations. Therefore, we believe that the balance of public interest favours not disclosing this information.

Any future correspondence with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service in relation to this matter should be sent to the Information Compliance Officer at the above address.

If for whatever reason you are unhappy with our response you may request an internal review by contacting DP@hantsfire.gov.uk or by writing to the Data Protection Officer at the above address.

Should you remain dissatisfied you can appeal against the internal review decision by contacting the Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

Information Compliance Officer
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service