



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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**Press Statement**

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## **BOMBA COMPELS USE OF UNREGULATED AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARM MONITORING SYSTEM**

Section 238 of the Uniform Building By-laws 1984 regulates that Automatic Fire Alarm Systems installed in designated premises (i.e. high occupancy premises like hospitals, hotels, schools, factories, etc) must have a direct telephone connection to the appropriate fire station bypassing the switchboard. The “Red phone” in such premises is the direct connection. This system has the approval of the General Insurance Association of Malaysia or PIAM. In dealing with fire emergencies, efficient monitoring of fire-alarms by trained personnel is critical and time is counted in seconds.

Lately, the Fire Department has been complaining that the Computerised Monitoring System (CMS) in use is sending too many false alarms to the fire stations and this is taking too much of its personnel’s time monitoring them.

So the Fire Department has decided to stop monitoring the automatic alarms, claiming that the companies providing the CMS system had refused to do anything to lessen the burden of monitoring on the fire department.

However, one of the companies we contacted said it had proposed to set up its own central monitoring stations that would be manned on a 24/7 basis by trained persons but the fire department did not respond to its proposal.

Instead, the Fire Department has appointed one (1) company to provide a different monitoring system which it claims will effectively resolve the false alarms issue. This system is called the SPKA (Sistem Pengawasan Kebakaran Automatik).

It has made it mandatory for the designated premises to change over to the SPKA system, failing which they will not be issued the Annual Fire Certificate.

The company providing the SPKA system does not have any central monitoring station(s) to be manned by trained personnel on a 24/7 basis.

The SPKA system requires the monitoring to be done by a few “responsible persons” in the designated premises. When the fire alarm is triggered in any of the premises, the system will send an SMS alert to the “responsible persons” (who may be busy with their normal duties, on leave, indisposed, outstation or overseas). They need to verify whether the fire alarm is genuine, and if so, call the Fire Department. If there is no response from any of them in a given time, the alarm is automatically re-directed to the fire department. It could still turn out to be a false alarm.

Asking laymen to double-up as fire alarm monitors is shocking. To our knowledge, it is not the practice in any developed countries. In developed countries, private companies supplying fire-detection and automatic alarm systems have to set up their own central monitoring stations that are manned 24/7 by trained personnel. These stations have to meet standards for physical construction and operational performance.

Insurance companies may also deny claims where an insured customers' fire-alarm system was monitored by ungraded monitoring centres.

The Fire-Department has not explained how the SPKA system could reduce false alarms as several factors can cause alarms to be triggered, e.g. use of fire-hoses to flush drains/floors; steam or dust near/around smoke detectors, etc. The SPKA system does not address the root causes of false automatic alarms.

CAP wants:

- The Ministry of Housing and Local Government to ensure that the monitoring of automatic fire alarm systems (which the Fire Department does not want to do any longer), is done in proper alarm monitoring stations complying with the standards in developed countries.
- The Ministry to stop the Fire Department from compelling designated premise owners/occupiers changing over to a system where their own staff/employees must monitor the fire alarms.
- The Ministry to ensure if monitoring of automatic fire alarms is no longer going to be done by the Fire Department, the job is not monopolised by one (1) company. Private companies should be allowed to compete to set up monitoring stations so that quality service is provided at competitive prices and standards are not compromised.
- PIAM to inform the designated premise owners / occupiers whether it approves of the SPKA's system and whether in case of insurance claims from them "self-monitoring" by their own employees will not be used as an excuse to decline claims.

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