

False Lone Worker Activations: Causes, Learning and Prevention

A cause library for learning from accidental alarms across fobs, pendants, fall detection, mobile apps, wearables and body-worn cameras.

**VERSION**

v1.1

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REVIEW

Annually or after an incident

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Treat every activation as real until safety is confirmed. A false alarm is not misconduct: it is evidence about carrying position, movement, interface design and training. Use the cause libraries to find the likely explanation, then record the control you are testing in the prevention plan at the end.

1**START WITH THE RIGHT RESPONSE**

CLASSIFY AS	MEANING	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE
False activation	Unintentional trigger with no actual risk or threat.	Confirm safety, close correctly, record the cause and learn.
Planned activation	Deliberate test, setup or practice alarm.	Label it correctly and check audio, location and response.
Precautionary activation	The worker feels uneasy or at potential risk.	Support the worker; do not relabel it as false because harm did not occur.
Incident	A serious safety or medical event requiring action.	Follow the emergency and post-incident process.

2**FOBS, PENDANTS AND ID-BADGE DEVICES**

SCENARIO	WHY IT MAY ACTIVATE	PREVENTION
Thrown or dropped onto a passenger seat	Impact, bounce or landing on the SOS control; a fall sensor reads rapid movement and stop.	Keep it on the person in the approved clip or holster; never throw it onto a seat, dashboard or bag.
Seat belt crosses the device	The belt presses the alarm or ripcord, or traps the device against the body.	Position it away from the belt path and test the wearing position while seated.
Stepping down from a van	A firm landing or jump creates a fall-like acceleration and abrupt stop.	Use three points of contact, step rather than jump and review sensitivity through the authorised process.
Lanyard or ripcord snags	Door handles, seat arms, shelving, bags, PPE or clothing pull the insert free.	Use the approved attachment and route it clear of snag points.
Leaning against a hard edge	Body weight presses a prominent control against a counter, desk or vehicle.	Move it to a protected position and use the approved holster.

Tight coat, hi-vis or body armour	Zips, radio loops, folds or layered PPE hold pressure on the button.	Run a dressed-for-work fit check while bending, sitting, driving and reaching.
Keys or tools share the pocket	Objects press, strike or move the alarm control.	Give the device its own carrying position; never store it loose with keys or tools.
Device put into a bag	Contents move onto the button or the bag is dropped while fall detection remains active.	Carry it on the person; follow the approved storage or safe-mode process when not in use.
Removed and put down firmly	A lunch, charging or security routine creates a device fall and abrupt stop.	Use a deliberate handover/storage routine and place it down gently.
Wrong press, hold or double press	A battery, call or activity function is confused with SOS.	Use model-specific cue cards and practise the exact button sequence.
Ripcord partly reinserted	The insert disconnects again during movement after cancellation.	Use a visual and gentle pull-check; replace worn inserts or damaged ports.

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FALL DETECTION AND WEARABLES

SCENARIO	WHY IT MAY ACTIVATE	PREVENTION
Swinging lanyard	Swing, impact and orientation changes differ from the configured body position.	Where required, use the belt clip or holster rather than a lanyard.
Jump, stumble or quick kneel	Rapid descent and a pause can match parts of a fall pattern.	Review normal job movements and practise the cancellation window.
Device falls from clothing	The device, not the worker, experiences a genuine fall and impact.	Check clip retention and garment thickness; replace weak clips.
Plant, machinery or rough vehicle vibration	Repeated acceleration may be interpreted as movement associated with a fall.	Keep it on the body, away from vibrating surfaces, and test in the real work environment.
Stillness after abrupt movement	Crouching or working beneath equipment completes a movement-plus-inactivity pattern.	Select settings suited to the task and teach pre-alert feedback and cancellation.
One sensitivity for every role	Office, driving, construction and community roles create different movement patterns.	Pilot role-specific settings with supplier support and review trends by team.

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MOBILE PHONE APPS

SCENARIO	WHY IT MAY ACTIVATE	PREVENTION
Wrong number of button presses	A configured power, volume or in-app sequence is completed unintentionally.	Teach the exact sequence on the issued handset, not generic app instructions.
Repeated presses when the phone appears slow	Delayed feedback causes the user to press again and complete an SOS sequence.	Teach expected vibration, tone and screen feedback and when to wait.
Phone squeezed in a pocket or holder	Tight clothing, vehicle mounts or tool belts operate side buttons.	Test cases and mounts and keep all controls clear.
Native emergency shortcut confused with app	The handset and app use similar sequences with different results.	Map both behaviours during deployment and issue a handset-specific prompt.
Wet screen, gloves or cracked display	Ghost touches or repeated attempts select the wrong control.	Provide a suitable case, glove-compatible method or approved physical trigger.
Unlocked phone handled by another person	A colleague, family member or client taps a prominent SOS control.	Use managed lock-screen controls and keep the device with the assigned user.

App left open while phone is put away	A palm, clothing or holder touches the active alarm area.	Confirm app state before stowing and use a holder that does not contact the screen.
Timer or welfare check expires	The worker forgets, is driving, cannot hear the prompt or cannot respond safely.	Set realistic durations, use pre-notifications and provide a safe extension/check-out method.
Poor signal delays cancellation	The alarm arrives but cancellation or follow-up is delayed.	Treat cancellation as unconfirmed until acknowledged; review coverage and fallback.
Replacement or shared handset	Different buttons, permissions, login or battery settings alter behaviour.	Repeat configuration and activation training whenever handset, SIM, OS or user changes.
Watch, headset or voice shortcut	A connected accessory executes an SOS action unexpectedly.	Document connected accessories and test or restrict shortcuts through managed settings.

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BODY-WORN CAMERAS AND CONNECTED DEVICES

SCENARIO	WHY IT MAY ACTIVATE	PREVENTION
Record control pressed while clipping on	The user grips or double-presses the event button while securing the mount.	Attach by the mount edges, confirm indicators and practise with the issued model.
Seat belt, radio or PPE contacts the camera	Equipment layers rub or press the event control.	Complete a full equipment-fit and vehicle-seat test.
Automatic activation sensor triggers	A configured holster, vehicle, door or other sensor starts recording.	Map, test and document every enabled automatic trigger.
Buffering confused with recording	The user misreads LEDs, tones or display and reports an accidental recording, or misses a real one.	Train on exact ready, buffering, recording, sleep and stealth indicators.
Stop press is incomplete	A long press is required but the user taps or releases before confirmation.	Teach start and stop separately and require confirmation from display, tone, vibration or light.
Camera knocked or dislodged	Doorways, straps, physical contact or vehicle entry move the camera and operate controls.	Use a stable approved mount, movement trials and a pre-shift retention check.
Paired app control used accidentally	A phone screen or connected control starts recording.	Restrict paired controls to operational need and include them in training and issue records.

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ORGANISATIONAL CAUSES

CAUSE	WHAT TO CHANGE
Generic training	Match instructions to the exact model, app, firmware, wearer, accessories and job.
No practice under work conditions	Practise with gloves, PPE, vehicles, poor signal, time pressure and realistic movement.
Fear of blame	Thank staff for confirming safety and reporting the cause; never make people reluctant to raise a real alarm.
Poor issue and return control	Verify the device, user profile, phone, accessory and escalation contacts at every issue or swap.
Unreviewed configuration	Review sensitivity, timers, button sequences and automatic triggers when the role or technology changes.

No trend ownership

Review repeated causes by device, role, vehicle, location and shift each month.

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REVIEW ONE ACTIVATION WELL

- [] Confirm the worker is safe. Do not assume an activation is false from silence or cancellation alone.
- [] Record the alarm type, device, wearer, time, location, carrying position and the activity immediately before activation.
- [] Recreate the movement safely where useful: seat belt use, vehicle exit, bending, PPE contact or phone handling.
- [] Check the exact user guide, configuration, accessory, firmware or app version, feedback and cancellation window.
- [] Choose the smallest effective control: carrying position, mount, prompt, practice, timer, sensitivity or supplier escalation.
- [] Test the change, brief affected users, and look for recurrence in monthly trend data.

NOTES AND ACTIONS

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PREVENTION PLAN

REPEATED CAUSE	CONTROL TO TEST	OWNER	DUE	EVIDENCE IT WORKED
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NOTES AND ACTIONS

LIMITATIONS

Examples are investigation prompts, not claims that every product behaves the same way. Follow the current instructions for the exact device, app, firmware and accessory in use, and confirm behaviour with the supplier where it matters.

SUPPORT

Safety Solutions Training helps employers build the confidence to raise an alarm early and the systems to respond well when they do. Call 02920 657753 or visit safetysolutionstraining.co.uk.