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45025

To all Chief Fire Officers

23 February 1977

Dear Chief Officer

DISTRESS SIGNAL UNITS - SIMILAR SOUNDS

[11/77]

1. My attention has recently been drawn to two devices which firemen may encounter in the course of their duties which emit a warning sound similar to that of the distress signal unit.
2. The first is a temperature-rise alarm fitted to frozen food storage cabinets marketed by Ace Refrigeration Ltd. The alarms are battery powered and are set to operate if the temperature within the cabinet rises unduly. There are four sizes of cabinet, of 16, 19.3, 22.5 and 29 cu ft capacity, and it is estimated that there may be between fifteen and twenty thousand in use in this country, many in frozen food stores. The importers have been approached and have been sympathetic to the views of the fire service to the extent that they are now considering whether to replace the trembler unit with a bell. But even if this is done it will still leave the problem of cabinets already in use, and in respect of these I can only advise you that enquiries should be made in the course of fire prevention and section 1.1.(d) visits to premises which may use freezer cabinets. Although attention was drawn initially to Ace Refrigeration Ltd products I understand that other cabinets of Italian origin may employ similar alarms.
3. The problem posed by these cabinets for fire fighters is obviously greatest in large multiple stores, where the temperature rise alarms, if operated by the heat of a fire, could distract men from other operations under the mistaken impression that a colleague is in difficulty. In one such location, the significance of the sound of these devices was pointed out to the store's safety officer who willingly agreed to fit bells in place of the trembler units; it may be that other retailers will be equally co-operative.
4. A similar problem has been brought to my attention in respect of alarms fitted to single-point detectors. The problem posed in such cases may not be quite so serious as that of the freezer cabinets because an alarm is likely to be sounding when the first appliance arrives and may indeed have been the reason for summoning the brigade. Nevertheless in a large building with several of these detectors their successive operation as a fire develops might attract firemen away from essential tasks. I am aware of two makes of detector which emit a sound similar to that of the DSU but, as in the case of freezer cabinets, there may be others.
5. At the present time a committee of the British Standards Institution is preparing a Code of Practice for fire alarms and initial indications are that the sound made by the alarms will be required to be pitched at a lower note than that

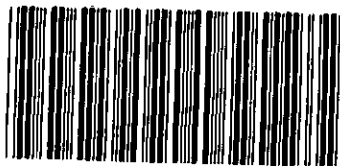
prescribed in specification JCDD/19/1 - Distress Signal Warning Device - and be coded so that the production of fire alarms with a sound similar to the DSU is likely to cease in the long term. However it would be as well for Brigades to make a note of premises where a number of these devices are installed.

Yours sincerely



No. 11 /1977

**The Fire Service
College**



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