



12. Fire - Detection & Alarm Systems - Detection & Alarm Systems Quarterly Test & Service

Category:	Fire
Subcategory:	Detection & Alarm Systems
Frequency:	Quarterly
Status:	Statutory
Type:	Approved Contractor
Priority:	Core
Commonality:	Common

Note: This document provides guidance to support compliance but is not a substitute for professional advice.

Why This Task Matters

Your regular oversight of quarterly fire alarm testing ensures that emerging faults are caught early, maintaining the reliability of this critical life-safety system. By supplementing annual services with more frequent checks, you provide assurance that the alarm system will perform when needed most in educational settings. Your proactive approach to system maintenance protects the large numbers of pupils and staff who depend on rapid, effective fire detection.

Task Summary

Statutory: A quarterly test and service by an approved contractor supplements the annual inspection, confirming continued reliability of the alarm system. This intermediate maintenance involves functional testing of key system components, checking for any emerging faults, and ensuring batteries and power supplies remain effective. The service includes testing alarm activation from call points, verifying sounder operation, checking control panel displays, and inspecting for any obvious faults or damage. This identifies emerging faults or battery failures before they compromise life safety. Regular testing is particularly important in education buildings where alarms cover classrooms, labs, sports halls, and theatres. Evidence produced includes the contractor's quarterly service record documenting all tests performed and results, test certificate confirming system functionality, and any fault reports

with recommended actions.

Relevant Legislation & Guidance

- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005:** Requires fire alarm systems to be regularly tested and maintained
- **Fire Safety: Approved Document B (Buildings other than dwellinghouses):** Provides guidance on fire alarm system testing frequencies
- **British Standard BS 5839: Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings:** Specifies requirements for system testing and maintenance
- **British Standard BS 9999: Fire safety in the design, management and use of buildings - Code of practice:** Includes guidance on routine testing procedures
- **The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014** (for independent schools): Requires regular testing of fire safety systems

Typical Frequency

The fire alarm system must be tested and serviced quarterly, with these intermediate checks typically scheduled during school term times to ensure continuous system reliability. In educational settings, quarterly testing is essential to identify issues that might develop between annual full services. The frequency cannot be reduced as it is a statutory requirement for maintaining system reliability in occupied buildings.

Applicability

This task applies to all educational establishments with fire detection and alarm systems, which is common in virtually all schools and colleges. It is a core statutory task essential for ensuring reliable fire detection in buildings occupied by large numbers of people. The task applies to all premises with automatic fire alarm systems and is particularly important in complex buildings with multiple zones or high-risk areas.

Responsible Persons

- **Task Type:** Approved Contractor
- **Contractor Requirements:** This task should be carried out by a competent fire alarm maintenance company with appropriate certifications. Contractors should be familiar with the specific system type and manufacturer requirements. Typical cost range: £200-£500 per quarterly visit depending on system size.
- **Permit to Work:** No permit to work is typically required, though coordination with building occupants may be needed.

- **Delivery Model:** Normally contractor-delivered due to the specialist testing equipment and technical knowledge required.

Key Considerations

- **Timing considerations:** Schedule during term time to maintain continuous system reliability
- **Cost implications:** Budget £200-£500 quarterly for professional testing and basic maintenance
- **Resource requirements:** Allow access to control panels and test points
- **Potential disruption:** May cause brief alarm activation during testing
- **Risk assessment requirements:** Test results should inform the fire risk assessment

Task Instructions

Prerequisites & Safety

- Ensure the contractor is familiar with the specific system type
- Provide access to system documentation and control equipment
- Inform building occupants about potential alarm activation
- Confirm emergency procedures are in place during testing

Tools & Materials

- System documentation and test procedures
- Access keys and security codes for control panels
- Test equipment for verifying system operation
- Temporary warning signs for testing periods

Method (Step-by-Step)

Phase A: System Preparation

1. Review previous test results and any outstanding issues
2. Confirm system status and check for any fault indicators
3. Prepare testing schedule to minimise disruption
4. Notify relevant staff about testing activities

Phase B: Functional Testing

1. Test control panel operation and display functionality

2. Activate alarms from different call points across zones
3. Verify sounder operation in all areas
4. Check system reset and silencing functions
5. Test power supply and battery backup systems
6. Inspect visible components for damage or faults

Phase C: Documentation and Reporting

1. Record all test results and system responses
2. Document any faults or issues identified
3. Prepare quarterly service record with findings
4. Issue test certificate confirming system functionality
5. Recommend any follow-up actions required

Measurements & Acceptance Criteria

- Alarm activation must occur within 10 seconds of call point operation
- Sound levels must meet minimum requirements in all tested areas
- System must reset and silence correctly after testing
- No faults should be present that affect system reliability

If Results Fail

Follow instructions on the Compliance Pod task completion form to record remedial/follow up actions and generate Reactive Task Tickets as required. Immediately investigate any system faults that could affect reliability. Escalate critical issues to facilities management and arrange urgent repairs. Implement interim monitoring measures if needed.

Reinstatement & Housekeeping

Restore system to normal operation and remove any temporary signage. Ensure all test equipment is removed.

Completion Checks

Verify that the quarterly service record documents all required tests. Confirm that the test certificate confirms system functionality. Ensure any issues are clearly identified with recommended actions.

Client Oversight Checklist (Before the Visit)

- Confirm contractor's familiarity with the system type
- Provide system documentation and access details
- Arrange access to control panels and test points

- Schedule during period when disruption is minimised

Client Oversight Checklist (During the Visit)

- Observe testing of key system functions
- Ensure comprehensive documentation of test results
- Verify that testing covers multiple zones and call points
- Confirm that any issues are properly identified

Deliverables & Acceptance Criteria (After the Visit)

- Receive quarterly service record with detailed test results
- Review test certificate confirming system compliance
- Ensure any recommendations are specific and actionable
- Confirm that documentation is complete and accurate

Defects & Follow-up

Follow instructions on the Compliance Pod task completion form to record remedial/follow up actions and generate Reactive Task Tickets as required. Prioritise repairs that affect system reliability. Agree timescales for addressing identified issues. Schedule additional testing if major faults are found.

Reinstatement & Sign-off

Confirm system has been returned to full operation. Complete final sign-off once all documentation is received.

Record-Keeping & Evidence

- **Upload Process:** Upload any required statutory or supporting evidence to the corresponding task form in Compliance Pod.
- **Statutory Evidence:** Quarterly service record and test certificate must be retained for at least 3 years.
- **Supporting/Good Practice Evidence:** Detailed test results and fault reports support audit readiness.

Common Pitfalls & Best Practice Tips

- **Common mistakes to avoid:** Scheduling during critical periods, not testing all zones, or failing to follow up on identified issues
- **Best practices for efficient completion:** Maintain consistent testing schedules, keep detailed records of previous tests, and coordinate with weekly in-house testing

- **Pro tips for educational settings:** Time tests to coincide with lesson changes, inform staff about testing schedules, and use quarterly visits to review system performance trends
- **Warning signs that indicate problems:** Frequent faults between tests, areas with poor alarm coverage, or delays in system response

Quick Reference Checklist

- Previous test results and system status reviewed
- Control panel and displays tested
- Alarms activated from multiple call points
- Sounder operation verified in all areas
- System reset and silencing functions checked
- Power supplies and batteries tested
- Quarterly service record and certificate received
- Evidence uploaded to Compliance Pod

Grouped Tasks

This task is not normally grouped with other tasks.

Related Tasks

- Fire - Detection & Alarm Systems - Detection & Alarm Systems Full Service & Inspection
- Fire - Detection & Alarm Systems - Detection & Alarm Systems Weekly Call Point Testing

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