

Is loss of communication with an alarm system considered an alarm event?



Your alarm company calls in the middle of the night to report loss of communication with your business's alarm system. How you react can make a big difference, both from a loss and business continuity perspective.

When setting up your alarm service account, you asked that your name be placed at the top of the alarm event call list. You believe you can reduce the risk of calling the police on a false alarm by using your knowledge of the business, your employees, and the contract cleaning service details. You can also access video streams from on-premise cameras on your phone, giving you the kind of perspective and insight you are sure will allow you to make the right decision.

Imagine this scenario:

Your alarm monitoring center calls in the middle of the night to report loss of communication with your business's alarm system. You check your smart phone app and discover the camera's communication is also lost. Since the burglar alarm didn't "go off" and your experience with your cable TV provider has made you all too aware that communication signal failures happen occasionally, you decide not to worry about it now and wait until morning to investigate the cause.

Did you make the right call?



Alarm signal versus loss of communication: Is there a difference?

From the perspective of UL 827¹, Standard for Central-Station Alarm Services, loss of communication with a security system, while that system is in the armed state, is required to be handled as an alarm event.

The rationale for this requirement lies in the fact that criminals frequently begin their attack on a property by cutting cables and disabling or destroying radio antennas. Nighttime loss of communication with a single monitored business property is considered highly suspicious activity; one that security experts who participate in writing UL Standards believe warrants investigation as a possible compromise attempt.

To mitigate the risk of unnecessary alarm response and police dispatch, UL Standards recognize the use of multiple, diverse communication technologies in a security system. By using appropriately configured arrangements of multiple communication types (such as both wired and wireless), each from different providers, a transient network outage on one communication path, does not impair monitoring center communication with your property over the other path – and an alarm event response is not required.

That said, simultaneous (or near simultaneous) loss of communication over both paths is a strong indicator of criminal attack on your property.



Loss of
COMMUNICATION
with your business's
ALARM SYSTEM,
WHILE IT IS ARMED,
should be TREATED as
AN ALARM EVENT.

Is AC power loss considered an alarm event?

Recognizing that transient power loss is likely to occur from time to time, UL Standards do not require AC power loss to be treated as an alarm condition. Rather, the Standards require 4 hours of battery backup for alarm systems, including all on-premise network or communication equipment needed to support continuous monitoring center communication. This helps keep ongoing alarm protection during typical, routine and/or isolated power disruptions.

If AC power is not restored to the batteries before they are drained, communication devices will cease functioning and your monitoring center will detect the communication loss. Monitoring centers operating in compliance with UL Standards will treat the event as an alarm signal and take required actions, including notifying people you placed on the alarm event call list.

Burglaries initiated with a power line cut

The [Jewelers Security Alliance](#) recently [reported a surge in burglaries that began with criminals cutting power to the property.](#)

Knowing that backup batteries will keep the alarm system alive for several hours, they patiently wait in a concealed location. After four hours, if there is no sign of investigator or law enforcement response, the burglars force entry, with a high level of confidence that they have an extended period of time to complete their attack and steal the targeted valuables.

If you believe you could be a potential target for an attack like the one described above or if your level of risk demands, your monitoring center may provide the option of being notified of AC power loss at your business, so that you can take appropriate response action(s).

In any case, loss of communication with your business's alarm system, while it is armed, should be treated as an alarm event. Failure to do so could put your employees, your property and your business at risk. Risk that, with the appropriate response to events like loss of communication, could be minimized or avoided.

¹ References are from UL 827, The Standard for Central Station Services

37.1 Alarm investigation (Central Station Burglary-Alarm Systems)

37.1.1 A burglar-alarm signal, communication outage, or unauthorized opening of a protected property that has been closed and the protection system armed, shall be investigated as an alarm condition.

37.7 Signals from systems other than central-station burglar-alarm systems

37.7.1 When an alarm or communication failure signal is received from a system that is armed and is not a central-station burglar-alarm-type as defined by this Standard, the central station shall take the following action:

- a) Where the system is a mercantile or bank burglar alarm that complies with the Standard for Installation and Classification of Burglar and Holdup Alarm Systems, UL 681, notify the agency(s) or person(s) specified in writing by the subscriber. In the absence of a written specification, an operator shall notify the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the protected property in a manner that complies with all applicable laws or ordinances; or
- b) Where the system does not comply with the Standard for Installation and Classification of Burglar and Holdup Alarm Systems, UL 681, notify the agency(s) or person(s) specified by the subscriber.

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