Overview:

The 2016 edition of NFPA 72, *National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code* (NFPA 72), is currently under development. First and second draft meetings (formerly called ROP and ROC meetings) have occurred over the last 18 months. Technical committees responsible for each chapter have met, reviewed proposed code changes received from the public and from within the individual committees, and have voted either to accept or reject the proposed changes. The technical committee on Supervising Station Alarm Systems (acronym SIG-SSS), Chapter 26, was no different. The committee addressed more than 75 proposals many of which were submitted to clean-up issues within the chapter related to old, not applicable definitions, operational issues, and a few issues related to redundancy.

A couple of key issues were addressed by the committee. The outcomes of these issues were: 1) Good for the fire departments in Illinois (elimination of the Pre-verification of fire alarm signals, Section 26.2.2); and 2) Not good for the Illinois fire service (elimination of the requirement that the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) must permit {approve} when signals {alarm, supervisory, and trouble} can go to a remote station other than the fire department, governmental agency, or communication center.)

This paper will deal with the second key issue.

History of Requirement:

NFPA 72 has, for more than 25 years, identified remote supervising station alarm system monitoring as primarily the monitoring of alarm signals by a public safety communications center, at a fire station, or at a similar governmental agency. NFPA 72 has allowed, either by exception or additional code language, that an AHJ could permit signal monitoring at another location where accepted by the AHJ (see Appendix 1).

NFPA 72 has also provided for two other methods of alarm signal monitoring. Central station service, which requires the use of a listed central station, is one option. Proprietary supervising station alarm monitoring is the second option. The model building and fire codes, as well as NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*, permit the use of any of the three supervising methods in accordance with NFPA 72.

The 2013 edition of NFPA 72 addresses remote station monitoring in 26.5.3 Facilities. 26.5.3.1 states:

“Alarm systems utilizing remote supervising station connections shall transmit alarm and supervisory signals to a facility meeting the requirements of either 26.5.3.1.1, 26.5.3.1.2 or 26.5.3.1.3.”
Section 26.5.3.1.1 permits the alarm, supervisory and trouble signals to be received at a communications center complying with NFPA 1221, Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems.

Section 26.5.3.1.2 permits the same signals to be received at the fire station or at the governmental agency that has the public responsibility for taking prescribed action to ensure response upon receipt of an alarm signal.

Finally, Section 26.5.3.1.3 states:

“Where permitted by the authority having jurisdiction, alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals shall be permitted to be received at an alternate location approved by the authority having jurisdiction.”

Illinois Issue:

For more than 40 years, many municipal fire departments and fire districts located in northeastern Illinois have created amendments to their building and/or fire codes which have eliminated any alarm supervising option other than the remote supervising station method directly to the fire department’s communications center or fire station for some or all of their occupancies that are required to install a fire alarm system.

Local requirements have been tested through legal proceedings against both municipal and district fire departments. In a case from the late 1990’s it was found that a municipal fire department could mandate only remote station directly (direct-connect) to the fire department’s dispatch facility. More recently, a court determined that a fire district could not.

The proposed code change would allow any remote station alarm system to send its signals to a listed central station without AHJ approval. As the revised 2016 edition of NFPA currently is proposed the language of 26.5.3.1.3 would read:

“26.5.3.1.3 Alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals shall be permitted to be received at a listed central station.”

The proposed change was submitted by a committee member who provides central station monitoring. Many of the SIG-SSS committee members also provide this service and would stand to benefit from this code change.

A suggestion to accept the proposed verbiage with additional language that would have included the requirements for Central Station Service (26.3) was quickly dismissed. Central Station Service requirements would have meant that runner service would have had to have been provided, additional system status notification would have been required to the fire department or AHJ, and 3rd party certification would have been
necessary. The additional requirements, while at an additional cost to the subscriber, would have assured additional fire alarm system oversite.

The proposed language does not require that an AHJ approve such a monitoring arrangement. The committee’s substantiation for the code change was “The added paragraph clarifies that listed central supervising stations can provide remote station service.”

The committee statement does not indicate a single technical reason why the code’s long standing requirement for AHJ approval should be removed. Discussion in the technical committee meetings included statements from the committee member making the proposal pointing to the recent fire district monitoring outcome. Input from another committee member countered the fire district outcome with the municipal fire department outcome that was opposite of the fire district’s. The overall committee discussion principally centered on issues related to Illinois which are now potentially resulting in the change of a national standard.

The committee statement does not indicate that sending signals to and through the listed central station is as fast, or as reliable, or is less prone to error in the transfer of signal information as are signals terminating directly at the communication center operating as a remote supervising station.

Finally, the committee statement states that the paragraph is clarifying that a listed central station can provide remote station service. There is no doubt that a listed central station can provide these services, but the code has been very clear for many editions that this can only occur with the approval of the AHJ.

It should be noted that NFPA 72 includes 55 locations where the term “Where required by…” is used and 5 additional locations where the term “Where permitted by…” is used. These very common terms allow the AHJ to determine whether or not they want to accept a method, condition, or option identified in NFPA 72. The proposed change would take away the AHJ’s ability to do so without any technical merit for why the AHJ should not have this ability.

**Effect of the Proposed Change:**

The proposed change would have no immediate effect on municipal fire departments that are using locally adopted amendments to require directed connect, remote station fire alarm signals.

An anticipated outcome of this code change to the 2016 edition of NFPA 72 would be that groups seeking to eliminate all alarm monitoring by local jurisdictions would go to elected officials and point to the NFPA 72’s requirements. The likely argument would be that NFPA allows remote station monitoring by a listed central station so why doesn’t your local jurisdiction.
Some groups, in recent court proceedings, have already inferred that listed central stations are NFPA’s preferred monitoring means. NFPA has directed those groups to stop making such statements as the statement is not correct.

For fire districts, the proposed change would provide an additional code-based item that could be used in legal proceedings against their district connection local amendments.

On the state level, this code change would likely be used to support a position that would be in conflict with any provision that might allow fire districts the ability to adopt direct connect requirements as their municipal counterparts currently have.

The group likely to point to NFPA 72 and the proposed language change when making its case to local and state elected officials would be the same group that drove the change within NFPA 72.

**Direct Connection Remote Station to the Communications Center/Fire Station versus Listed Central Station Remote Station:**

Two important differences exist between directly connected remote supervising station alarm systems and those alarm systems that send signals to and through the listed central station or any other third party signal receiver:

1) There is no handling time necessary to retransmit alarm signals when the signals are received directly at the same location (communications center) from which they are dispatched. This is not true when the signals go to a listed central station or other third party; and,

2) The communications center, and consequently the AHJ, directly receiving alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals knows the status of all alarm systems within their jurisdiction.

Signals of any type, once received, should be addressed in a timely fashion.

For years, signals received at the fire department’s communications center have been addressed in several ways. Alarm signals are routinely immediately dispatched to fire companies. The handling of supervisory and trouble signals are handled in methods that may differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions respond with a fire apparatus or the fire prevention bureau to check out the signal. Other jurisdictions initially call the protected premises to advise the tenant of the signal received and may respond to the site if no responsible party can be reached. Other jurisdictions may do nothing. Regardless of how the signals are addressed, the status of all fire alarm system signals is known by the jurisdiction.

Signals transmitted to a listed central station would likely be handled in accordance with the requirements of NFPA 72. Under 26.5.6.1 Remote Supervising Station Alarm System rules, the listed central station would be required to immediately (explained in
code annex material to be within 90 seconds) transmit an alarm signal to the responsible communications center in accordance with 26.2.1 and to immediately notify the owner or owner’s designed representative. The owner or owner’s representative is also to be immediately notified of supervisory and trouble signals, but the AHJ only receives these signals where required. The code does not state that the AHJ is to be notified of a restoral of the alarm, supervisory or trouble signals previously received. The status of fire alarm signals may not be known by the jurisdiction.

Possible Action by Interested Fire Service Agencies or other Parties

The membership of NFPA is likely to be asked to vote on the following proposed change to 26.5.3.1.3:

“26.5.3.1.3 Alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals shall be permitted to be received at a listed central station.”

It is expected that a Notice of Intent to Make a Motion (NITMAM) will be filed to reverse the action of the technical committee and that the NFPA will issue a Certified Amending Motion (CAM). This will allow a floor discussion on the proposed change by the NFPA membership at the 2015 Annual Conference and Exposition to be held in Chicago. The expected floor discussion will occur either on June 24th in the afternoon or sometime during the day on June 25th. Prior to a formal vote being taken on the CAM, members of the Illinois fire service should be encouraged to express their opinions during the floor discussion by either being “In Support” of the motion or by being “Against” the motion followed by their reasons.

As previously stated, the proposed change removes the necessary approval, as has been the case for more than 25 years, of an AHJ prior to permitting a listed central station to act as the remote supervising station that receives signals from a fire alarm system. The proposed change allows the fire alarm contractor and the owner of a fire alarm system to determine where the fire alarm signals goes even under the rules of Remote Supervising Station Alarm Systems.

The proposed change would appear to reduce the ability for the fire department or AHJ to have knowledge of the status of alarms within their jurisdiction and could slow the dispatching of fire apparatus by sending signals through a third party or listed central station.

To be debated in Chicago will be either to:

Accept the CAM which will reverse the work of the technical committee and as such return the language in the code to the 2013 edition of NFPA 72 which would require AHJ permission to use a listed central station for Remote Supervising Station Alarm Systems;

or
To **Reject** the motion which would mean that the proposed language of “**26.5.3.1.3**
Alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals shall be permitted to be received at a listed central station.” would become the code language for the 2016 edition of the code.
### Appendix 1

Code sections indicating that alarm signal monitoring can occur at locations other than the fire station, public fire service communications center, or other governmental agency where permitted by the AHJ:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Edition</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>4-5.3.1 (Exception )</td>
<td>“Where such an agency (public fire service communications center, at a fire station, or at the similar government agency) is unwilling to receive alarm signals, or will permit acceptance of another location by the authority having jurisdiction, such alternate location shall have personnel on duty at all times trained to receive the alarm signal and immediately retransmit it to the fire department.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4-4.3.1 (Exception)</td>
<td>Same language as 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5-4.3.1 (Exception)</td>
<td>Same language as 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>8.4.2.1.2</td>
<td>“Where permitted by the authority having jurisdiction, fire alarm and supervisory signals shall be permitted to be received at an alternate location approved by the authority having jurisdiction.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>8.5.2.1.2</td>
<td>“Where permitted by the authority having jurisdiction, fire alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals shall be permitted to be received at an alternate location approved by the authority having jurisdiction.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>26.5.3.1.3</td>
<td>“Where permitted by the authority having jurisdiction, alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals shall be permitted to be received at an alternate location approved by the authority having jurisdiction.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>26.5.3.1.3</td>
<td>Same language as 2010</td>
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