



Expert commentary

BS 9518:2021 — *Processing of alarm signals by an alarm receiving centre — Code of practice*

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1 Overview

BS 9518:2021 is the first edition of this standard and gives recommendations for the processing of alarm signals received at an alarm receiving centre (ARC). For those readers unfamiliar with ARCs, these are typically a continuously manned remote centre, operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to which information concerning the status of alarm systems are reported. The primary function of an ARC is to receive and process alarm signals.

Processing of alarm signals is more commonly known as 'handling alarms' and relates to the actions taken by the ARC on receipt of an alarm signal, e.g. how quickly they process them, how they prioritize them during busy periods, who they inform when an alarm has been received.

Presently there are several British Standards that apply to an ARC such as BS EN 50518:2019, BS 8591:2014 and a withdrawn standard BS 5979:2007. These differ from BS 9518:2021 in that they focus more on the building construction and technical facilities rather than how the ARC should process each signal received. BS 9518:2021 contains no recommendations on construction or facility but instead focuses on how the different alarm signals that an ARC receive should be processed.

Note: BS 5979:2007 was withdrawn following the publication of BS EN 50518:2019. Although a withdrawn standard, some ARC operators remain compliant with BS 5979:2007.

Alarm signals processed by an ARC may originate from many different types of security or life safety alarm systems, e.g.:

- intruder and hold-up alarm systems (IGHAS)
- fire detection and alarm systems
- video surveillance systems (formerly known as CCTV)
- social alarm systems
- lone worker systems

The response given by an ARC to a signal from these different types of security or life safety system will vary significantly depending on the cause or source of the alarm. For example, on receipt of a fire alarm signal originating from a residential care home, the ARC response is likely to be to call the Fire and Rescue Service (F&RS) immediately, whereas on receipt of an intruder alarm signal that occurs at 08:00 in the morning the initial response is likely to be to contact the premises.

BS 9518:2021 brings together into one standard the recommendations for how an ARC should process these different alarm signals.

1.1 Reasons for this standard

There are two main reasons for development of this standard:

The first reason is to incorporate recommendations on the processing of alarm signals contained in a number of other standards into one standard. Previously, there were a number of standards applicable to the security industry that gave recommendations both for the installation of a security system, which applied to an installer, and for the processing of the signals, which applied to the ARC. Examples of these were:

- BS 8243:2021 – *Design, installation and configuration of intruder and hold-up alarm systems designed to generate confirmed alarm conditions – Code of practice*
- BS 8418:2021 – *Design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of detector-activated video surveillance systems (VSS) – Code of practice*
- BS 8484:2016 – *Provision of lone worker services – Code of practice*

These standards apply to different sectors of the security industry and while that does not present a problem to an installer operating in that sector, it made life difficult for the ARC as they monitored alarms from all these sectors.

An added problem caused by having recommendations for processing signals in different standards, written by different committees, is that they often conflict with each other. Bringing all recommendations for processing the different type of alarm signals into one standard should alleviate this problem.

The second reason is that following the revision of BS EN 50518:2019 in 2019, BS 8591:2014 – *Remote centres receiving signals from alarm systems – Code of practice*, is due to be withdrawn.

BS 8591:2014 contains recommendations for processing fire alarm signals which have been incorporated into this standard.