January 2, 2018

Q: Per the regulations, is there a maximum amount of time that you can be “offline” and be following Fire Watch protocol? For example, if the facility needed to be offline due to an issue with the fire panel and parts needed to be ordered or a new fire panel needed to be installed.

A: In response to your question, the answer is no. There is no time limit a facility can be on a fire watch, except, of course, common sense. Facilities should try to limit the fire watch to the least amount of time possible. A fire watch is basically a substitute for the fire safety device/feature that is compromised. The fire watch must provide a level of safety, as close as possible to that, which would have been provided by the compromised feature/device.

A fire watch must be performed by an individual that has no other duties, except the fire watch; and that individual must have some verifiable knowledge/training in fire safety. The frequency of a fire watch must also match that of the compromised device/feature. Using your example, if a fire panel were out of service, the frequency of a fire watch would be continuous (24/7) because the fire panel provided 24/7 protection. The fire watch must be documented and records must be maintained on site.

A fire watch is not an easy method to provide compliance. It is only considered a “stop gap” measure.