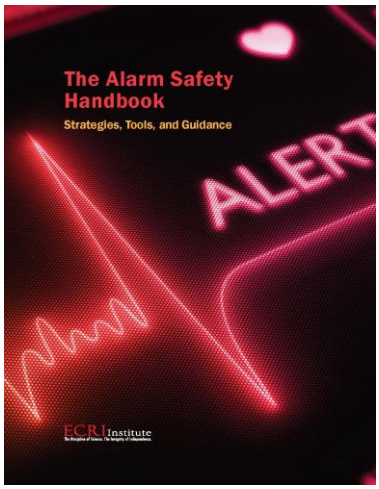
Contents

The Alarm Safety Handbook and *Workbook*

Alarm hazards have been recognized as a key patient safety issue, and healthcare facilities are expected to develop programs to assess and improve how clinical alarms are managed. ECRI Institute developed *The Alarm Safety Handbook* and *Workbook* to help healthcare organizations deal with these formidable tasks. This material provides a starting point from which hospitals can begin to create their own alarm management programs to help them protect their patients, as well as to meet the Joint Commission's new National Patient Safety Goal on alarm safety.



Members of ECRI Institute's Health Devices System™, Health Devices Gold™, SELECTplus™, and PSO Plus™ services can access electronic (PDF) versions of these resources through their member websites. (Members also can purchase print editions at a reduced price.) Members of other ECRI Institute programs may be eligible for discounts.

For member or nonmember pricing information or to place an order, call +1 (610) 825-6000, ext. 5889, or e-mail circulation2@ecri.org.

The Alarm Safety Handbook

Strategies, Tools, and Guidance

The Alarm Safety Handbook outlines the measures facilities need to take to effectively manage clinical alarms. A critical early step in that process is to form a multidisciplinary team to learn about the issue, to identify safety vulnerabilities within each care area, to study best practices, and to guide the organization's improvement efforts. The resources in this *Handbook* and in the accompanying *Workbook* (see below) will help team members work through that process.

CONTENTS:

Preface	7
What Are Clinical Alarm Hazards?	7
A Top 10 Hazard	8
A National Patient Safety Goal	9
Chapter 1. Making Alarm Management a Patient Safety Priority	11
The Scope of the Hazard—Looking Beyond Alarm Fatigue	12
Alarm Hazards by the Numbers	14
The Joint Commission's Requirements	18

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https://www.ecri.org/Products/Pages/The-Alarm-Safety-Handbook-Strategies-Tools-and-Guidance.aspx

Addressing the Hazard 20
Chapter 2. Understanding Clinical Alarm Hazards—A Conceptual Model 23
The Life Cycle of an Alarm 24
Alarm Activation 27
Alarm Load 28
Alarm Notification 29
Alarm Content 30
Alarm Escalation/Backup 31
Policies/Staff Education 32
Alarm Resolution 33
Chapter 3. Creating an Action Plan 35
The Path to Alarm Safety 36
1. Set the Tone 38
2. Form a Multidisciplinary Team 40
3. Establish Priorities 43
4. Conduct an Alarm Audit 46
5. Identify and Implement Strategies 48
6. Assess, Refine, and Repeat 49
Closing Remarks 50
Chapter 4. Putting the Plan into Action 53
Using ECRI Institute Tools and Resources 54
Workbook Contents 55
Tool for Step 1—Setting the Tone 55
Tool for Step 2—Forming a Team 55
Tools for Step 3—Establishing Priorities 55
Additional Tools and Resources 56
Chapter 5: Identifying Best Practices 59
Useful Resources 61
Guidance Documents 61
Tools and Resource Lists 61
Webinars 62
Research Studies and Other Literature 64
Supplier Assistance 64
Case Studies 65
Boston Medical Center 65
Standardization of Alarm Defaults for Telemetry 65
Using a Cart-Based System to Provide Patient Monitoring Training at the Point of Care 67
Improving the Management of Telemetry Alarms 68
The Johns Hopkins Hospital 71
AAMI Foundation HTSI Safety Innovation Series 74

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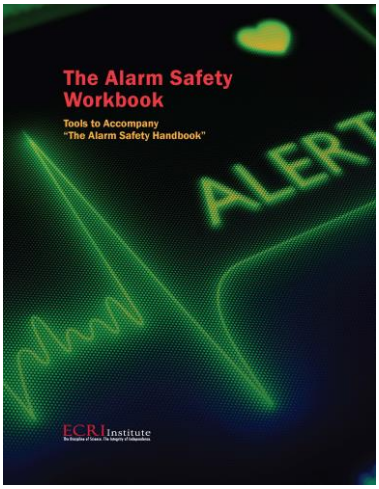
The Alarm Safety Workbook

Tools to Accompany
The Alarm Safety Handbook



ECRI Institute developed the tools and resources listed below, along with the guidance presented in *The Alarm Safety Handbook*, to support alarm management teams in their efforts to improve clinical alarm safety, and thus meet the Joint Commission's National Patient Safety Goal on Alarm Management (NPSG.06.01.01).

Specifically, ECRI Institute developed these materials to help alarm management teams work through various steps of the action plan described in Chapter 3 of the *Handbook*. Editable versions of these materials, along with form-specific instructions, can be downloaded with the electronic version of *The Alarm Safety Handbook*. Once downloaded, healthcare facilities can customize the information to meet the unique needs of their facility.

CONTENTS:

Purpose and Use 7

ECRI Institute Tools

A. Sample Announcement from Leadership 8

This sample letter can serve as a guide to assist hospital leaders in announcing the alarm management effort and in communicating its importance to staff, particularly to clinical staff whose work may be affected by—and, as importantly, whose expertise may contribute to—the effort.

B. Alarm Management Team Roster 10

One of the first steps in complying with the Goal—and, more broadly, in managing clinical alarms—is the creation of a multidisciplinary alarm management team. This document offers suggestions on who should be on the team and why.

C. Care Area Assessment Checklist 12

This sample checklist suggests issues for members of the alarm management team to consider when assessing individual care areas for factors that can impede effective alarm management. The form directs the user to rate both the alarm load within the care area and any obstacles to effective alarm communication and response.

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D. Nursing Staff Survey 16

Every alarm management effort should involve obtaining feedback directly from frontline caregivers, particularly from nursing staff. This tool solicits information from nursing staff about which alarm signals (within their care area) warrant the attention of the alarm management team.

E. Incident-Report Review Form. 22

As noted in the Goal, the involvement of an alarm signal in incidents at your facility is a potential measure of importance. This sample form is intended to guide the team through some of the issues to think about during its review of the facility's previously submitted reports of alarm-related incidents and problems, helping to determine what degree of risk a particular alarm signal may present.

F. Alarm Review Tool. 25

This Excel spreadsheet is intended to serve as a repository for information obtained using the other tools provided. The spreadsheet allows the team to compile all the information collected and simultaneously review all the key alarm signals identified by the team. Once information is entered, Excel functions (e.g., filter, sort) can be used to facilitate simultaneous review of ratings that the team has assigned to all the unique alarm signals under consideration.

G. Starter List of Alarm Signals. 28

This document lists those medical devices and associated alarm signals that ECRI Institute believes every hospital should consider when initiating an alarm management program. Even if your team eventually determines that managing other signals is more important, we recommend that you initially spend some time thinking about the items on this list.

H. Strategies for Reducing the Alarm Load. 30

This document presents a few strategies that healthcare facilities have used to help reduce the number of alarms that staff encounter. Reducing the number of clinically insignificant alarms that activate is a key aspect of alarm management improvement efforts.

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