

Maintain a Strong Presence in your State Capitol

By John Chwat, NBFAA Director of Government Relations



Consider this scenario: the state legislature is in session—a very short session of 60 days. The state senate is considering a bill to “tax” every alarm monitoring company \$1 a month per customer to pay for a state benefit program. Twelve million dollars or more in revenue from these fees is at stake. The senate committee members and staff are meeting in a room and as they talk, they increase the proposed fee to \$2 and they pass the bill. Several days later, the bill passes the state senate.

Would you be there? Wouldn't it be important for you to be involved? You bet. And this is one of many real life effects the state legislature can have on your business. As you read this article, this and other legislation are being considered.

Last year, well over 92,000 bills of all types were introduced by state legislators across the country. Many of these bills do not pass, but there are quite a few that do, and of those considered, many impact the livelihood of NBFAA members, employees, customers and all of their families. NBFAA monitors all 50-state legislatures on a regular basis and publishes for the membership a monthly state legislative report which can be found on the web site, www.alarm.org.

To maintain a strong presence in the state capitol when the legislature is in session, the first order of business is to find out when your state legislature meets. If you visit the following site from the National Conference of State Legislatures, you'll find a list of the 2009 sessions when legislators, staff and officials are in session: www.ncsl.org/programs/legismgt/about/sess2009.htm. Most state capitols meet for a small fraction of the year—60 or 90 days at the most. Some meet all year round. Find out when the legislature in your state meets.

The next item of business is to determine the specific issues for your state and your state capitol. The following link from the same site provides an opportunity for you to select your state, and click on the state legislative Web site: www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm.

While each state is different, NBFAA is aware that many state chapters maintain a presence in the state capitol during a given session and that some state chapters hire lobbyists to watch for, report and influence legislation and regulations that impact the membership. No matter what the composition of the state chapter is, whether they're large, medium or small, and no matter how involved they are in state legislative matters, it is critical to offer your services to go to the capitol during the session and to attend or present your views on legislation or policies.

NBFAA works with allied organizations within the industry, as well as state chapters and members on state legislation. This article is a CALL TO ACTION to you, your employees, family and customers to become active and aware of the importance of visiting the state capitol to protect your business operations.

There are many bills that impact your business—whether it's licensing of electricians or imposing requirements on apprenticeship training, setting low voltage standards for installation requirements or licensing, certification and testing hours—whatever you do to earn a living and provide for your family is a target. With states lacking resources and experiencing millions or even billions in budget deficits, more and more bills are introduced to target the security industry for taxation to generate money to pay for the deficits. Many other industries are active in state capitols and their lobbying impacts the electronic life safety and security industry. You should consider being there, too.

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The following are some points to keep in mind:

Know the bills or policies that are being considered in the legislature and whether you are for or against them. This is very important to understand. Information on these bills can be provided by your state chapter or by reviewing the NBFSA state legislative report. You should know your stance on the bills being considered and how they affect your business or the industry.

If there is a bill or policy that impacts your business, the next decision is, "what will I present or say while in the capitol and who will I see?" Usually, the state chapter prepares a letter or one-page position paper that can be given to the legislator or staff. These materials briefly state the bill's provisions, why you are opposed or in favor of one or more provisions and the arguments for or against. If there are no materials available from your state chapter, it is important for you to write down how you feel the legislation will impact your business. Many times, legislators are more impressed with personal impact statements than a mass mailing of issue papers. "Bring it home" to the legislator. Help him or her understand the impact of the legislation on the community and your business and customers.

Once you know the legislation that is pending, how it will impact you and your business, and the position you will take, plan a trip to the legislature. What is the best time to go? The answer relates to the "status" of the legislation. Is the bill going to have a hearing or be considered in a committee? If so, the timing of the trip should be centered on this hearing. Presence at the hearing is crucial to impact the legislators and staff. There are committee rules that determine the order of speakers and the timing of bill consideration—these are all different in each state. If the bill has been introduced, and there is no hearing, you can still present your views. It is especially important to be in the state capitol when the bill is being considered by the full state Senate or full House of Representatives.

"Should I go as group or by myself?" During the session of the state legislature, it is always best to go as a group—perhaps your state chapter will organize a visit. The key to answering this question relates to the elected officials from your district. While it is important to meet leaders in your legislature

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that can decide on the bills, it is almost as important to meet individually with your elected official. This is where you will have your greatest impact.

Visiting with elected officials in the state capitol can be an experience. It is a busy place, very hectic when in session, and the staffs are very busy as well. Some key points to bear in mind should you meet with legislators and staff during your visit:

- Be prepared. Bring **business cards** to hand out to the legislator or staff so that they may follow up with you.
- Know your issue, have your position paper and be ready to talk for a brief time. Watch the legislator or staff person to see if they are listening or taking notes.
- Let your legislator know that you are in the state capitol on behalf of the industry, your employees, customers, family, neighbors and friends. This expands your importance to the legislator and staff.
- Be polite and do not argue.
- Take notes to inform your state chapter, their officers, lobbyist and others on what was said and the position taken. This can be very critical to the success or failure of the legislation. Should the legislator tell you an important fact on the status of the bill, or ask if your group wants to consider a change

in the bill, tell him or her that you will get back to them immediately.

- Always follow up with a letter (including your point of contact address) thanking him or her for the meeting and fax the letter to the attention of the staff member or legislator in his or her capitol office.
- Consider a follow-up meeting with the legislator or staff in their DISTRICT office. Maintain good connections. They will become invaluable in the near- and long-term for you and the industry.

A strong industry presence is needed in state capitols each and every year as legislation becomes more intrusive into your daily business operations. Keeping in touch with elected officials and letting them know how legislation affects the electronic life safety and security industry is a very important part of your business operations. Do not let elected officials determine how you serve your customers and how you run your business.

If there are any questions, or if we can provide any additional information, feel free to contact us at Gov.Info@alarm.org.

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State Legislation

State Legislative Report

STATE LEGISLATIVE REPORTS (MEMBERS ONLY)

- State Legislative Report - January 2009
- State Legislative Report - December 2008
- State Legislative Report - November 2008
- State Legislative Report - October 2008
- State Legislative Report - September 2008
- State Legislative Report - August 2008
- State Legislative Report - June 2008
- State Legislative Report - May 2008
- State Legislative Report - April 2008
- State Legislative Report - March 2008
- State Legislative Report - February 2008
- State Legislative Report - January 2008
- State Legislative Report - December 2007
- State Legislative Report - November 2007
- State Legislative Report - October 2007
- State Legislative Report - September 2007
- State Legislative Report - August 2007

For more information on your state legislative report, visit www.alarm.org