RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

Alliant

Vacant Buildings – Reduce Your Risk

Unoccupied buildings left idle for a few weeks or even months aren't just at risk for theft and squatters. Fire, water damage and environmental issues also put the property at risk for high dollar damage. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), approximately half of all vacant building fires are intentionally set. Consider these four key areas before leaving a location vacant.

Increase Building Security

Visible security is a crime deterrent. To reduce the appearance of long-term vacancy, consider adding these protective measures:

- increase security watch presence
- increase exterior lighting and motion light sensors
- additional locks and gates
- glass-break monitors
- video surveillance
- control who has access
- cut back hedges and overgrown trees/shrubs
- engage a nighttime security company
- isolate water, gas and electric supplies and accessibility
- notify local police department the building is idle and be aware of anyone on or near the property

Theft – Vandalism – Trespassing

One of the major exposures at vacant properties is theft. Copper piping, wires and other valuable components are attractive to thieves. If the building(s) appear vacant, there is a lower likelihood of being caught. The best strategy is to give the appearance the building is occupied. Be sure to address these areas;

- promptly remove graffiti and repair broken windows and fences
- install timers on lights in offices and other rooms in the building
- deter homeless camps inside and out by making it difficult to gain entry (multiple gates, locks, barbed wire)
- maintain the landscaping; removing trash and other debris
- alert nearby neighbors to report any unusual or suspicious activity to law enforcement

Remove Hazardous Items

Eliminate fire hazards within buildings by removing as many combustibles as possible. Remove any debris or other fire hazard, including flammable liquids, compressed gas, and combustible items. Maintain a 25 foot clearance around the building, including removing dead trees or overhanging large tree limbs that could cause damage in a severe storm.

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Fire Protection

Fire is extremely difficult to recover from. To mitigate fire damage and hazards take these precautionary steps:

- Maintain a building temperature of 50° F
- Keep sprinkler systems active. Control valves must be locked in the open position or electronically supervised.
- Sprinkler systems should remain in service and monitored by a central station alarm company.
- Fire suppression systems should continue to be maintained by a state licensed and qualified contractor in accordance with your local authority inspection, testing and maintenance requirements
- Unblock open fire doors. They must remain closed unless they are controlled by an automatic release mechanism or fusible link.
- Keep heat or smoke detection system in service
- Unplug non-essential electrical equipment
- Notify the local fire department of the idle or vacant buildings and provide access as needed

Inspect Building Weekly

Frequent inspections will aid in minimizing failed equipment, such as boilers, water pipes, lighting, running toilets, roof leaks, electrical shorts, fire alarms, and gas leaks. Use a checklist to make the process easier for your facilities team, include the following areas:

- Bathrooms
- HVAC System
- Boiler & Mechanical Rooms
- Classrooms/Offices
- Fire Alarm Panel
- Gas (odor)
- Roof (pooling, clogged gutters, downspouts)
- Perimeter (storm damage)
- Sprinkler system
- Lighting (proper orientation, adequate level, damage or burnt out bulbs)
- Evidence of squatters
- Mold/mildew
- Security Systems (Fences, Gates, Locks, CCTV, Alarms)

This Alliant Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice

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