

Risk Control Guide RCG109

# Protection of Unoccupied Buildings

## Introduction

Fire, theft and malicious damage in empty premises cause losses in the millions of pounds annually.

Non-ferrous metals such as copper and lead have been particularly targeted by thieves, with many losses involving cabling, pipework, sanitary fittings and lead from roofs.

There is also evidence to suggest that once a building has been attacked in this way, further attacks can occur within a short period of time.

Vacant properties can also be the target of illegal occupants/squatters who may also cause damage while present on site.

Good management procedures including regular inspection visits (at least once a week) and regular maintenance of the property and fire and security systems can help to prevent criminal attack and also reduce the eventual cost of remedial work should a loss occur.

It is important to ensure that the fabric of the building is maintained in good order. Without regular maintenance an unoccupied property can quickly become run-down and attract the unwelcome attention of vandals, fly-tippers, squatters and the like.

Graffiti should be removed and any damage repaired without delay.

In addition to the damage and theft aspect, the health and safety of visitors, welcome or otherwise, should also be considered. Unoccupied buildings are an attractive playground to children and a 'duty of care' is owed to them even though they are trespassing.

When a building is to be vacated and no other tenants are moving in, action should be taken in order to ensure the safety of the building and those people having legitimate access, or indeed making unauthorised entry, to that building.

## Contents

Combustible contents and waste materials offer fuel for the arsonist and temptation to thieves.

- All combustible contents and waste should be removed immediately from within and around the premises. This should include all furniture, and all other removable items not forming part of the fittings to be included in a sale. For short term unoccupancy (up to 6 weeks), it may be more practical for some items of furniture to remain, but these should be kept to a minimum. These items should be stored out of sight of ground floor windows.

- Fuel oil tanks to heating systems which are to be isolated and those containing other flammable liquids or combustible waste should be drained and made safe from potential explosion risk arising from residual vapour. They should also be secured to ensure that children are unable to get inside, as there have been instances of fatalities where tanks have been used as a “playground”.


In addition, ensure that objects that may be of use to an intruder to assist their intrusion/climbing etc. should be removed from outside areas.

## Services

- All services and any fuel supplies should be shut off at the switch or stopcock.
- Gas, electricity and water supplies should be turned off (unless essential for maintaining heating, fire protection or intruder alarms).
- Ensure that postal and other deliveries are stopped and that the letterbox is sealed.

## Security

### Doors

- Ensure all external timber doors are of solid construction, and if not consider replacing them or reinforcing them with sheet steel. All frames of external doors should be securely fixed to the building fabric.
  - Fit BS3621 mortice deadlocks to all external doors other than designated fire escapes. Alternatively, ensure kite marked cylinder locks are used for deadlocking or for throwing multilock bolts.
  - Where deadlocking is not an option, fit good quality closed shackle padlocks (CEN Grade 5-6) together with manufacturer’s matching locking bars.
  - Fit key lockable track bolts to the running tracks to folding, sliding and roller shutter doors.
  - Alternatively fit substantial shoot bolts that are fixed firmly to the inside of the door and that also secure firmly into the frame at the top and bottom.
  - Where any of the doors are of double leaf construction, the first closing leaf should be secured with substantial shoot bolts as above, and then secured to the second leaf by a deadlock/padlock as above.
  - Protect all outward-opening external doors with hinge bolts.
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- Ensure that the panic release bolt-work on fire exit doors is maintained in good condition and that the securing bolts fully engage when the doors are closed.

### Glazing

- Fit substantial boarding to protect vulnerable glazing in windows, doors, skylights and other openings. Boarding should be exterior grade plywood at least 19mm thick and should be secured into the window and door frame with a minimum of 50mm exterior non return screws.
- Mesh grills such as “Expamet” can be used as an alternative to boarding.

### Roofs

- To prevent the theft of lead, consider restricting access to roofs by installing anti-climb paint to drain pipes and roof guttering. This paint should not be installed below 2.4 metres and warning notices highlighting its use should be prominently displayed.
- Consider security-marking metals such as lead with one of a range of products that are available for this purpose, for example as supplied by:

Selectamark [www.selectamark.co.uk](http://www.selectamark.co.uk)

Smartwater [www.smartwater.com](http://www.smartwater.com)

- Given that cabling and pipework (theft targets) may be impractical to mark, consider the use of such products on door handles that intruders are likely to come into contact with. Ensure also that signage is clear to potential intruders that the site is protected by SmartWater etc.
- Carry out regular checks on roofs to ensure that any theft of roofing materials is discovered quickly in order to minimise the risk of subsequent damage by rainwater ingress.

### Perimeter Security


- Consider protecting the site with a security fence to meet BS1722 part 12 or 14 part 12 (weld mesh or steel palisade) with topping. Ensure also that site gates are of commensurate quality, to the height of the site fence and secured with high grade closed shackle padlocks that are enclosed by a shroud to prevent forcible attack of the lock.

Identify all potential vehicular entry points and consider the use of more robust barriers such as concrete blocks and bollards to reduce illegal occupancy.

### Security Lighting

- Assess internal and external security lighting and improve the quality and coverage if necessary; careful placement to reduce shadows and hiding places for intruders. Movement detection lighting is a good deterrent.

### Electronic Security Systems

- The installation of an intruder alarm system by a company that is recognised as an installer of intruder alarms by either the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) ([www.nsi.org](http://www.nsi.org)) or Security Systems and Alarm Inspection Board (SSAIB) ([www.ssaib.org](http://www.ssaib.org)) should be considered, if not already installed. A well designed, installed and maintained intruder alarm system can provide an effective security measure, deterring potential intruders and offering early warning of intrusion. Key specifications to discuss with alarm companies are:
  - Grade 3 alarm system in accordance with PD 6662/BS EN 50131.
  - Alarm system detection should be confirmable as per BS 8243.
  - Alarm signalling should be dual path to either DP3 or DP4 as per PD6669/BS EN 50136.
  - Remotely monitored by an NSI/SSAIB approved alarm receiving centre.
  - Either a Level 1 Police response or a Police approved keyholding company to respond to confirmed activations within 20 minutes.
  - Site keyholders will need to respond to all activations (confirmed or not) within 20 minutes.
  - Alarm sounder to be active.
  - Consider installing a remotely monitored video surveillance system (VSS) by a company, that is recognised as an installer of CCTV systems by either NSI or SSAIB. Where fitted, such systems should be detector activated, equipped with audio talk back facilities and remotely monitored by a similarly approved receiving centre, preferably the same one as the fire/intruder alarms. Ideally the VSS should be to the BS 8418 standard.
  - Consider fitting a security fog system. This device should be installed and maintained in full accordance with BS7939-1999 and any local Police and Fire Brigade requirements. It should be interfaced with, and activated by, the intruder alarm installation.
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## Guarding

- If your business would benefit from the services of contract manned security guards for either site based or visiting patrols, make sure that you use only personnel licensed by the Security Industry Authority (SIA) and companies approved by either NSI or SSAIB. Guards should operate in pairs.

## **Specialist contractors**

There are several companies offering specialist security services in relation to unoccupied properties. A range of services is available including:

- Site survey and inspection programme.
- Sealing of doors and windows.
- Fitting of purpose designed temporary alarm and access control systems.
- Response to alarm activation.
- Site clearance and maintenance programmes.

Companies offering these services can be found via the 'Company Finder' facility of the British Security Industry Association website <https://www.bsia.co.uk>.

## **Fire Protection**

Where the system provides a signal to an alarm receiving centre, any automatic fire detection or suppression system installed in the premises will continue to provide early warning and/or control of fire and should be retained where still operational and conditions allow.

It is important that the systems continue to be properly maintained, particularly with the change of environment that unoccupancy introduces.

It should be ensured that sprinkler systems are charged with air, in the winter months, if the design of the system allows, or adequate arrangements have been made to ensure pipework is not left vulnerable to freezing. If it is not possible to maintain the sprinkler system it should be drained down.

## **Who do I need to notify?**

You should notify as necessary the local Fire Service, Police and Insurers:

- The location, type and quantity of any materials that may continue to be stored on site.
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- The state of the water supplies to the site, particularly where the water supply has been disconnected to hose reels or sprinkler installations.
- The state of any intruder alarm and/or automatic fire detection system, particularly if there is a connection to an alarm receiving centre.
- Access to the site, if this has been altered or blocked (e.g. for perimeter security).
- Any alterations to the security that may impinge on fire escape routes for neighbouring premises.

## Insurance

Many of the risk management features contained in this document may also form part of your insurance policy. You should check and ensure that you comply with all policy conditions and warranties (both those present in the original policy document and those applied subsequently, e.g. since your premises became unoccupied).

## Health & Safety

Authorised visitors such as surveyors, guards, contractors and prospective purchasers/tenants will need to have access to the property at various times. The health and safety of such visitors should not be placed at risk while undertaking their duties and, to ensure their safety, the following points should be considered:

- Warnings should be given with regard to any specific danger, e.g. structural defects.
- Adequate light should be made available.
- Barriers should be provided around any dangerous or unsafe areas.
- Details of those visiting the premises should be recorded.
- Visitors should be equipped with personal alarms and mobile telephones and ideally should not enter the building unaccompanied. They should also advise another party of their estimated time of return.

### Disclaimer

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