



Risk Management Security Services

Briefing Paper: Vacant Property Inspections

What needs to be considered when you are faced with an empty property to manage?

Firstly a discussion with your insurance company must be held to identify any requirements they may have that will pave the way for how you manage the building going forward.

It also worth advising the local Police and Fire Service that the property will be empty so they at least have a record of this in the event of an incident.

For properties where the owner is looking to protect their asset we would suggest the following six key steps are taken.

1. **Survey** - ensure a full survey is completed to identify any areas of the site that are vulnerable and what measures can be taken to reduce the risk to the site. Particular consideration should be given to the perimeter of the site and any means of access to the site and building.
2. **Review the Environment** – consider the immediate area in which the property is located and look at surrounding buildings and the neighbourhood. If there are clear signs of building damage, vandalism and general crime you might need to consider additional measures of security. Alternatively there may be options to eliminate the disorder from the area by other means e.g. demolition of derelict buildings.
3. **Health & Safety** – it is very important to remember that as the owner of a property you have responsibility under the Occupiers Liability Act to ensure the site is safe for all persons entering the property. A regular inspection of all areas should be undertaken to report any areas that may have become dangerous or present a hazard to anyone who may use the site.
4. **Services** – conduct a thorough review of the services required and leave on only what is essential. This will always include electricity to support systems such as lighting and intruder alarms but consideration should be given to heating, air conditioning and other plant/maintenance systems as to whether they are absolutely necessary. Your M&E contractor will be able to advise of the best approach as some systems have different settings to cater for changes in building use.





5. **Keyholding** – with an empty property it is vital that access can be gained either in an emergency or if other parties need to conduct repairs or view the building. It is therefore advisable to employ a local security company who can hold keys under BS7984 conditions and provide a response to site 24 hours a day.

6. **On-Going Maintenance** – to dramatically reduce the risk of a building being targeted by criminals or attracting anti social behaviour it is important to keep the area in good condition. This can be easily achieved by having a contract with a maintenance company to keep the area clean and tidy and who will ensure the general appearance of the grounds and building do not encourage abuse. The “Broken Window Theory” means that if one window is broken and is not repaired you will very quickly find that others are broken. This applies to litter and the accumulation of, graffiti and other building damage.

Summary

When managing a building that is vacant be sure to **prepare** and be **organised**. Very often the building may have been occupied 24 hours a day and there may be many adjustments and checks needed to the systems and facilities to ensure they meet the requirements of insurers and offer suitable protection to the property.

As an example to the above we recently took over vacant property inspections for a building previously used as a corporate headquarters that had been occupied 24 hours a day by staff and security. Due to this, the alarm had never been set and required extensive work to, firstly mobilise it and secondly meet the requirements of the insurers.

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