



## *Vacant Property Security:* **a property owner's guide**

THE VOICE OF THE PROFESSIONAL SECURITY INDUSTRY

## Introduction: vacant property



At any one time there are a considerable number of vacant commercial properties throughout the country. Without adequate protection these properties can be subject to misuse and either deliberate or unintentional damage. The provision of good physical protection and other such security solutions can help minimise and often prevent misuse and damage to these properties. Vacant buildings are at heightened risk from fire, deterioration and criminal activity. The reputation of property owners can be damaged and relations with neighbours put under strain.

In addition, insurance premiums for long-term vacant properties can often be high unless those responsible can show they have taken a broad range of sensible precautions. Arson is responsible for more than half of the known causes of fire damage in commercial and industrial property. It is very important to take every possible step to mitigate risks. Owners and managers of vacant property have a 'duty of care' to anyone entering the building.

The following provides a summary of best practice on vacant property security management.

One of the most important first actions for owners is to allocate clear responsibility for all aspects of vacant property management. This is an important role and includes managing the shutdown of the building, conducting a risk assessment and reducing different types of risk. Property owners must also exercise a 'duty of care' to anyone entering the premises from trespassers to members of the emergency services.

### Key management responsibilities and tasks:

#### Insurance

- Inform insurer that property is vacant.
- Check and comply with policy requirements and keep adequate records.

#### Risk Assessment

Undertake risk assessments to ensure compliance with:

- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- Health and safety legislation.
- Environmental legislation.
- Public liability legislation.

Also carry out appropriate risk assessment for:

- Structural and equipment hazards.
- Building structure (and undertake survey if required)
- Conduct security assessment (see over).

#### Inform Other Parties

- Inform police and fire services of building occupancy status, including temporary tenancies.
- Account for all keys and inform police and local fire brigade of all key holders (not all forces hold keyholder details).
- Inform local authorities if applicable.
- Seek the co-operation of neighbours in adjacent buildings; they can be very useful in reporting unauthorised entry.

#### Building Preparation

- Turn off all water supplies at mains except for sprinklers; drain systems down.
- Turn off all gas supplies at mains unless continuous heating required.
- Turn off all electrical supplies except as required for the functioning of heating alarm and detection systems.
- Remove all combustible materials and hazardous items.
- Remove any building contents which might attract thieves.
- Reduce unwanted attention by stopping postal deliveries.
- Clean off graffiti.
- Maintain an appearance of continued use if possible.
- Enhance perimeter security as appropriate.

# Security/Protection

## Assessment

The security status of a vacant property should first be assessed. The following should be reviewed:

- Current state of property.
- State of current security measures.
- State of current fire detection measures.
- Is the power supply still functioning (for alarms)?
- State of current perimeter protection.
- Is the property of high value so high-level security is required?
- Could the property be subject to potential repeated attacks implying increased security measures?
- Are all openings/letterboxes sealed.

## Consideration

A combination of the following security measures should then be considered:

- Perimeter fencing and gates.
- Close off access to car parks.
- Overnight movement-activated lighting.
- Employ licenced security guards or alternatives, as appropriate.
- Anti-climbing paint.
- Secure current doors/windows.
- Temporary or permanent shuttering or screening.
- Mains powered temporary intruder alarm system.
- Battery powered temporary intruder alarm system
- CCTV.
- Net curtains.
- Seal letterboxes and openings.

## Maintenance

- Carry out weekly inspections to check the key points listed in this guide.
- Maintain all fire and security equipment in good working order; test regularly.
- Control any work done by contractors for fire risk.
- Maintain fire/smoke alarms/sprinklers.



## Contractor Organisations

Contractors should be reputable companies that understand the implications of vacant properties; check credentials. Security contractors should operate to relevant British Standards for the licensed security services they are supplying and/or hold certification to NSI (Gold) or the SIA's ACS accreditation.

Employees of the contractor delivering security services must hold a current SIA license, and have been screened and vetted to British Standard BS7858.

Insurance companies may insist on specific requirements for contractors; check credentials. BSIA members are best suited to complete work and credentials are already checked. Employ security specialists who provide 24/7 services for all of the above requirements in one call; check credentials.

## Useful Information

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

The Occupiers Liability Acts 1957 and 1984

**BDM10:** Code of Practice for the Protection of Unoccupied Buildings, Fire Protection Association, 2008

**BS 8584:2015:** Vacant property protection services. Code of practice

**BS3621:** Lock assemblies operated by key from both the inside and outside of the door

**BS7499:** Static Site, Guarding, Mobile Patrol Services. Code of Practice

**BS7858:** Screening of individuals working in a secure environment. Code of practice

## Organisations

Arson Prevention Bureau

[www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk](http://www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk)

British Security Industry Association

[www.bsia.co.uk](http://www.bsia.co.uk)

Fire Protection Association

[www.thefpa.co.uk](http://www.thefpa.co.uk)

The RISC Authority

[www.riscauthority.co.uk](http://www.riscauthority.co.uk)

National Security Inspectorate

[www.nsi.org.uk](http://www.nsi.org.uk)

Security Systems Alarm Inspection Board

[www.ssaib.org](http://www.ssaib.org)



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