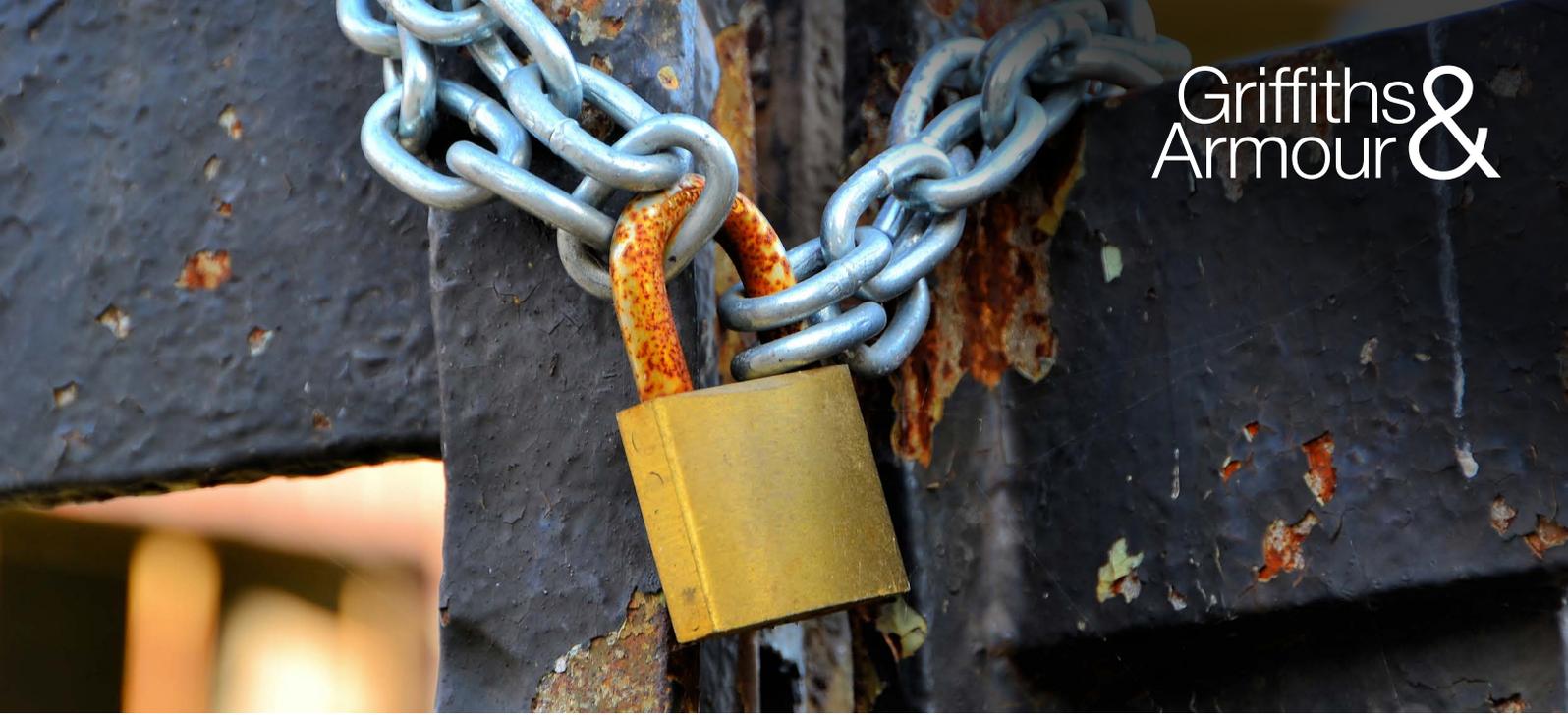




# UNOCCUPIED BUILDINGS

**RISK DIRECTORY  
2020/2021**



# UNOCCUPIED BUILDINGS RISK DIRECTORY 2020/2021

## INTRODUCTION

Empty buildings come in many guises and include properties such as warehouses, factories, offices and retail outlets. It is generally accepted that buildings that remain empty for any length of time are considered to be an easier target for thieves and vandals, and are exposed to increased risks including vandalism, theft, arson and water damage. This can be due various factors including inadequate maintenance and security, or poor management controls. On average 60 fires a day occur in empty buildings and each year 40% of vacant commercial premises suffer vandalism. In recent years there has also been an increase in the theft of copper cabling and pipework and lead roof flashing due to their high scrap value.

To minimise potential risks to unoccupied properties it is essential that prompt action is taken to safeguard them. This document seeks to outline the key legislation and provide guidance on management responsibilities, risk assessment and potential risk reduction and control measures.

## KEY LEGISLATION

Key legislation includes:

### **OCCUPIERS' LIABILITY ACTS 1957 AND 1984**

This legislation places a duty of care upon owners and managers of vacant properties to visitors and others, such as passers-by, trespassers and squatters. It also requires an occupier to be prepared for children to be less careful than adults, whether invited onto the premises or otherwise.

### **THE REGULATORY REFORM (FIRE SAFETY) ORDER 2005**

The Order applies to most non-domestic premises and workplaces within England and Wales. Many duties refer to a 'responsible person', which can include property owners. The legislation places a broad duty upon responsible persons to ensure the safety of their employees and others by taking general fire precautions to make their premises safe



**ON  
AVERAGE  
60 FIRES  
A DAY OCCUR  
IN EMPTY  
BUILDINGS**

# MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

**The safety and security of all premises, whether occupied or empty, is a management responsibility and must be subject to the same disciplines as all other aspects of management. When a property is to be vacated by an existing occupant, this process should be undertaken in a structured way. If a managing agent is to assume responsibility for the empty building, a formal handover should take place, including an accompanied inspection prior to the handover.**

It is normally a condition of property insurance that insurers are notified of any material alteration to the change in circumstances of a building, such as it becoming vacant. When properties do become unoccupied, insurance cover may be restricted and additional precautions required by insurers. Other bodies that may need to be informed include the police, fire brigade and local authority, who should be notified of the identity of keyholders.

Unoccupied properties should be inspected both internally and externally by appropriate individuals on a regular basis, usually weekly. Checks should include the integrity of existing security and fire protection arrangements and the condition and housekeeping of the property. It is essential that the building is maintained to ensure that it does not become a hazard to the public, including applying measures to prevent unauthorised access or use. Any damage identified during an inspection should be repaired immediately. All visits should be recorded and documented.

If there is the likelihood of children trespassing, then it may be necessary to take further precautions to prevent their access. Individuals who at some time will be expected to require access to a vacant building include building contractors, security guards, surveyors and prospective purchasers, all of whom should not be placed at undue risk while undertaking their duties. In respect of visitors, points to consider include:

- Ensuring warning notices are displayed if appropriate, for example to highlight fragile roofs, razor wire, etc.
- Adequate lighting is available for visiting individuals, for example security guards, contractors, prospective occupiers, etc.
- Recording details of all visitors or contractors to provide an audit trail.
- Instigating procedures for lone visitors.



## RISK ASSESSMENT

Good risk management practice includes undertaking a risk assessment as soon as it is known that a building is to become vacant, as this will seek to identify the potential threats to the property and its contents.

Issues to consider as part of this assessment include:

- Condition of the building
- Arrangements for visitors
- The general nature of the area
- Compliance with insurer's requirements
- Anticipated length of unoccupancy
- Ensuring all keys are accounted for
- Security arrangements
- Redirection of mail
- Public utilities
- Ongoing management arrangements for the property

Where individuals are required to carry out work on empty properties, risk assessments should be prepared by those responsible to take into account the hazards and risks posed.

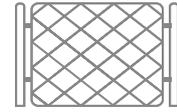
# RISK

## RISK REDUCTION AND CONTROL MEASURES

The guidance is broken down into the following sections, which will then be considered in turn:



## PERIMETER PROTECTION



- Any existing perimeter fencing and gates provide the first barrier against potential intruders. They should be well maintained and secured, and the use of temporary fencing, earth mounds, rocks, bollards, etc. should be considered to restrict unauthorised pedestrian and vehicle access to the site.
- Trees and foliage should be maintained to allow an unobstructed view of the site.
- Security lighting is known to be an effective deterrent, particularly where the property can be seen from neighbouring property or by passers-by. Review the existing level of lighting and improve coverage if necessary.

## PHYSICAL PROTECTION



- All letterboxes should be sealed up and mail redirected.
- External doors should be maintained in good condition and secured using good quality locks, such as those complying with BS3621. If not already in place, additional protection for vulnerable doors, such as roller shutters or grilles, may require consideration.
- Consider changing locks if the property was let to a tenant.
- Whilst glazed openings such as windows and skylights are generally fitted with key-operated locks, additional security may be required in unoccupied properties for these openings. Increased security measures such as the fitting of bars and grilles approved to LPS (Loss Prevention Standard) 1175 may be appropriate for openings which are deemed to be vulnerable.
- In properties which do not have effective supervision or monitoring, and where re-occupation is not imminent, window and door openings could be 'boarded up'. This is often a more cost-effective method than installing roller shutters or grilles, and involves timber boarding (although steel sheets can also be used if required) being fixed to the external fabric of the building to protect the opening. Careful consideration should be given to the visual impact that this will have on a property. Bricking up openings may be required depending on the locality and the expected length of unoccupancy.
- To prevent unauthorised access to roof areas, consider applying 'anti-climb' paint to drain pipes and roof guttering. Such paint should not be applied below 2.4 metres and suitable warning notices should be displayed highlighting its use.



## INTRUDER ALARMS

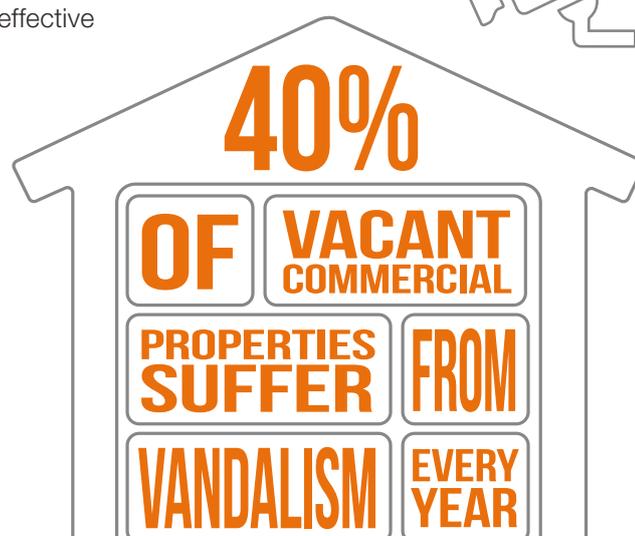
Intruder alarm systems can form an integral part of the strategy for the protection of vacant properties. It is recommended that any existing intruder alarm systems, including maintenance and testing arrangements continue to be operational. Alarm systems should conform to BS EN50131 and be maintained by a company accredited by a relevant body such as the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) or the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB). Systems should have remote signalling to an approved Alarm-Receiving Centre.



Depending on the anticipated length of the unoccupancy, there may be circumstances when it is appropriate to install a temporary intruder alarm system.

## CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION SYSTEMS (CCTV)

Remotely monitored CCTV can provide effective protection to vacant properties and any existing system should ideally be kept operational and suitably maintained. If no system is in place, consideration should be given to installation in accordance with relevant standards, such as BS 8418. In a similar way to intruder alarm systems, temporary CCTV systems are available, but once again this would depend on the anticipated length of unoccupancy, location, etc.





## SECURITY GUARDING

Guarding is available in two forms; on-site guards or mobile patrol services. It is suggested that any guards employed are registered with an appropriate body, such as the NSI, with individual guards conforming to any necessary licensing requirement. Vacant property security specialist services are also available.



For on-site guards consideration should be given to times of attendance. Instructions should be provided to the guards to ensure that they complete the tasks expected of them with regard to security patrols, monitoring of the premises, etc. They should have means and procedures in place to enable them to communicate with their control centre on a regular basis.

Mobile patrols undertake to randomly visit and inspect vacant properties at a set number of times each day. This type of guarding is considered to be less effective, offering less of a deterrent than static guards.

## CONTENTS

Wherever possible, contents should be removed from vacant premises, particularly combustible items and those of value. Combustibles and waste outside the building, such as skips, pallets and fuel, should be removed. Property-marking is available to protect vulnerable sections of the building such as electrical copper cabling and lead roof flashing. These products are relatively easy to apply and render the items readily identifiable.



## UTILITIES

The water, gas and electricity supplies to the vacant property should be disconnected or isolated, other than where necessary for fire protection, heating, safety or security purposes. Disconnection or isolation should be undertaken in such a way that reconnection is not easily achievable by trespassers. Water systems should be drained down unless an automatic sprinkler installation is present, and/or the heating system is to remain operative.





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**BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND SUPPLY CHAIN**



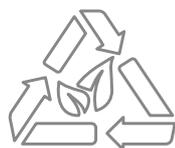
**CYBER RISKS**



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**PROPERTY RISKS**

If you would like to discuss any of these risk management services please contact us on 0151 236 5656 or by [email](#).



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

- Code of Practice For The Protection of Empty Buildings: Fire Safety and Security - The Fire Protection Association

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