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Vacant Premises Precautions

INTRODUCTION

The incidence of fire (mainly arson), theft and malicious damage in vacant premises continues to rise dramatically.

Vacant premises that are left uncared for are at greater risk of being targeted for trespass, theft, malicious damage and arson. In view of the increased scrap metal prices, thieves will look to strip out non-ferrous metals that are found in pipes, cabling and lead on roofs. If access to the premises is relatively easy, then children/youths can become attracted to the premises for horse-play which can escalate to malicious damage and arson. This also introduces a greater risk of injury and potential legal action.

PROACTIVE ACTION NOW IS BETTER THAN REACTIVE ACTION WHEN IT'S TOO LATE

Most of the precautions provided in this section are little more than common sense and good practice and will help reduce the risk of the vacant premises becoming a target.

PRECAUTIONS

- The owner of every building has a legal responsibility (under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 or Fire (Scotland) Act 2005) to undertake a Fire Risk Assessment. Arson should always be considered as part of this assessment giving thought to the:
 - Location of the property – surrounding areas, history of vandalism.
 - Vulnerability of secluded or out of sight areas.
 - External combustibles – construction, waste, fly tipping, vegetation etc.
 - Adequacy of existing security to the site and buildings.



PRECAUTIONS



- Introduce regular (at least weekly) internal and external inspections of the premises using the enclosed checklist and retain records.
- Maintain the fabric of the building by removal of graffiti/fly posters, repair/replacement of damage and reinstatement of security measures if breached, without delay.
- Ensure combustible contents are cleared from the building and waste is removed without delay.
- Ensure any skips or waste containers present during works are kept a minimum of five metres clear of the buildings.
- Ensure any vegetation is well cut back to prevent the buildings becoming secluded or in dry conditions providing fuel for a fire.
- Deter access to the site by erecting perimeter security fencing or permanent bollards to prevent vehicle access (fly-tipping).
- Ensure all doors and windows and outbuildings are suitably secured with good quality locks, gaps under doors are as narrow as possible and letterboxes are sealed up.
- Where malicious damage is likely to be a significant risk, ensure that all exposed glazing is boarded over.
- Prevent access to lower/flat roofs.
- Ensure the buildings are protected by an intruder alarm system installed and maintained by a UKAS accredited intruder alarm company.
- Consider the installation of a CCTV system with remote monitoring.
- Consider contracting the services of an NSI approved Manned Guarding Security Company.
- Consider contracting the services of a specialist security company who specialise in the management and protection of vacant premises.
- Isolate all water, electricity and gas services (unless required for intruder/fire alarms, sprinkler systems or heating).
- If an automatic fire detection system is installed, ensure the system remains operational and is maintained.
- If a sprinkler system is installed, ensure the system remains operational and is maintained and arrangements made to prevent freezing of sprinkler pipes during cold weather.
- Ensure there are no open manholes, excavations and potential hazards on the owned land.
- Ensure contractors are suitably supervised and controlled by Permit to Work system.

FURTHER GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION

Intruder Alarm/CCTV installers & Manned Guarding Companies – National Security Inspectorate www.nsi.org.uk

Specialist Security Companies – British Security Industry Association www.bsia.co.uk
(search under ‘Vacant Property Protection’)

Government Fire Safety Guidance www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw

Health & Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk