Protection of Empty Buildings

CFPA-E Guideline No 02:2025 S

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Fire Safety | Security | Natural Hazards

The Security Commission of the Confederation of Fire Protection Association Europe (CFPA-E) has developed common guidelines in order to achieve similar interpretation in the European countries and give examples of acceptable solutions, concepts and models. The CFPA-E has the goal to facilitate and support fire protection and security aspects across Europe.

The market imposes new demands for quality and safety. Today, fire protection and security aspects form integral part of a modern strategy for survival and competitiveness.

The guidelines are primarily intended for the public. They are also aimed at the rescue services, consultants, safety companies and similar, in the course of their work, they may be able to help increase fire safety and security in society.

These guidelines have been compiled by the Guidelines Commission and are adopted by all fire associations in the CFPA-E.

These guidelines reflect best practice developed by the countries of CFPA-E. Where the guidelines and national requirements conflict, national requirements must apply.

This Guideline has been compiled by the Security Commission and is adopted by the members of CFPA Europe.

More information: www.cfpa-e.eu

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Key words:

1 Introduction

Buildings need appropriate protection at all stages of their life, from construction through to eventual demolition. Although empty buildings are always at risk from various forms of criminal activity and deterioration, the risks increase if the building is left empty for any length of time.

Buildings become empty for many reasons, for example during and following construction/ refurbishment, awaiting letting, or pending sale or demolition. Sensible precautions taken at the time a building becomes empty and subsequent follow-up action will minimise the risk of loss or damage.

2 Scope

This document provides guidance to those responsible for any empty or unoccupied premises (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial buildings) for conservation purposes. The vacancy may be of short duration or prolonged over time.

Section 18 of this document contains a general checklist of actions for owners of empty buildings, parts of which are extracted and commented upon within the main document.

Appendix A contains specific advice about empty buildings of architectural or historical significance, where special considerations may apply. In such cases, consultation with the appropriate authorities is recommended.

3 Synopsis

Although it is not possible to address every type of situation in detail in this document, the guidance presented, if adopted sensibly by owners, managers and managing agents, will reduce losses from empty buildings, whether due to theft, vandalism or deliberate fire raising (arson).

The safety and security of all empty buildings is a management responsibility subject to the same disciplines as all other aspects of management.

4 Definitions

For clarification, and to avoid unnecessary repetition/qualification within the body of this document, the following terms are considered to mean:

- owners – those responsible for the empty building. According to the circumstances of the building, this could be those who own the building, leaseholders, tenants, or managing agents and their staff
- building(s) – land and any structure/property built upon it, plus any contents within
- empty building(s) – buildings that, to all intents and purposes, are not being used as a workplace, store or as accommodation.

5 The Extent of the Problem

The surveillance and care exercised through the normal occupation of a building contributes to its security and fire safety, but in the case of an empty building, this protection will not be available.

The degradation of unoccupied buildings affects not only owners and their insurers but also the society generally, emergency services and the police, but also the public through a feeling of insecurity, risks of fire and vandalism and their environmental impact e.g. fire water run-off and contamination.

Many insurers report very significant fire and theft losses from such buildings on an annual basis.

6 Managing the Shutdown

When a building becomes empty and occupancy is not imminent, it is necessary to manage the shutdown in an orderly and structured fashion. Where a managing agent, builder or specialist firm is taking over responsibility for an empty building, a formal handover should take place, which should include an accompanied inspection prior to handover.

When a building is vacated, even on a temporary basis, the insurer of the property should be informed.

A risk assessment should be undertaken (this may be a requirement of local or national legislation), either by the owner or agent, with appropriate measures taken to reduce the risk of fire and/or intrusion. Where the assessment indicates that there is a high risk of intrusion or malicious damage, steps should be taken to improve the levels of both security and protection.

Items of value should be removed immediately and if the building is likely to remain empty for more than a few weeks, action should be taken to remove all waste, surplus furniture and other items not forming part of the fittings. This should include floor coverings where possible, if these are likely to be combustible.

Action should then be taken to 'put the building to sleep'. This should include arranging redirection of post, providing physical protection to the exterior elevations and possibly upgrading the level of perimeter security. The necessary disconnection/isolation of selected services and checking of protective installations such as fire detection and alarm systems and sprinkler systems should also be undertaken at this stage.

Liaison with the local planning authority may help ensure that any proposed external security alterations do not create planning problems.

7 Motives of the Intruders

Intruders in empty buildings may have several motives:

- to steal any contents;
- to strip the premises of any electrical, plumbing, or architectural fixtures and fittings;
- to vandalise or burn down the premises;

- to squat on a permanent or semi-permanent basis;
- to use the building for illicit drinking, drug supply, dealing or use, storage of stolen property or other illegal activities;
- to use the premises for their own purposes, such as trading or parties;
- to play and/or have fun.

The attractiveness to younger persons of empty buildings as a potential playground should be considered, especially as children are able to gain access through very small gaps such as fanlight windows or minor holes in walls. Young people may consider an empty building as a suitable space for meeting places or underground parties.

8 Fire and Empty Buildings

There is no doubt that graffiti and damage to an empty building, however caused, leads to further damage, and that damaged buildings encourage arsonists.

Arson fires usually follow a pattern, beginning with the setting of small fires causing limited damage. If the building is not regularly inspected and, as required, re-secured and repaired promptly, an escalation in the frequency and size of incidents can be expected, often resulting in the destruction of the building. Preventing or reacting to 'small' incidents can therefore prevent a major loss happening.

Fire needs combustible materials in order to grow and it is therefore important to clear empty buildings of all combustible contents wherever practical, and to prevent an accumulation of wastepaper/post etc. that may be delivered or maliciously dumped.

9 Risks for the Emergency Services in Empty Buildings

Fires in empty buildings present problems to firefighters that do not normally occur in occupied premises. For example, weakening of the structure may occur due to vandalism, damage caused when stripping out fittings, or the starting of small fires.

Potential hazards include:

- holes in flooring and staircases;
- missing balustrades, stair rails and banisters etc;
- debris/junk blocking internal access routes;
- missing manhole or drainage covers;
- weakened flooring beneath heavy fixtures such as water tanks, leading to potential collapse;
- large numbers of jagged edges and surfaces such as broken glass; exposed nails and rough metal surfaces;
- exposed and damaged electrical wiring and live gas services;
- compartmentation compromised by other actions.

All of these hazards can have serious consequences for firefighters attempting to safely access the building, potentially resulting in severe or even fatal injuries. Where the fire and rescue service consider that there is an undue risk of harm involved in entering an empty building, a decision

may be taken to fight a fire from outside only, with the consequence that the damage to the building by fire, smoke and water could be significantly increased. The risks to firefighters and the building itself are likely to be greatly reduced if, after careful consideration and consultation, it is determined in the fire risk assessment for the premises that any fire detection and/or suppression system(s) should and can safely remain operational (cf. chapter 13).

10 Information for the Fire Service

As part of the efforts to combat building vacancy, the local authorities often identify unoccupied buildings (e.g., after 6 months). Authorities are invited to inform the fire service.

Prior to the long term and planned shutdown of a building, local fire brigade should be informed:

- the preplanning map will be updated and forward to the emergency services (fire brigade, police) :
  - available access;
  - condemned or blocked entries, corridors, stairs, rooms;
  - specific residual risks;
  - main valves and switches;
  - contacts of the responsible person or watcher;.
  - the state of the water supplies to the site, particularly where fire water supplies or sprinklers have been disconnected;
  - occasions when the building is to be brought into temporary or occasional use, particularly where this may result in a significantly higher fire load within the building ;
  - the ease or otherwise of access to the building, including the availability of roads, presence of high security fencing and availability of keyholders
  - any predetermined arrangements for re-securing the building ;
  - unusual or unexpected hazards which may be encountered.

11 Temporary use of Empty Buildings

An empty building is an unused asset and an owner will normally be anxious to sell or re-let the building as soon as possible. However, where buildings look likely to remain empty for lengthy periods, it can be useful to grant a temporary licence for a short-term let, particularly as use of a building is one of the best precautions against the problems that can beset empty buildings.

Some temporary activities may be subject to license by authorities and/or compliance with specific regulations. In any case a specific risk analysis is required for public events and workplaces. The manager of the temporary activity is responsible for safety and security and – if necessary – he has to create a fire protection and security concept.

11.1 Factors affecting Safety and Security

Nevertheless, short-term rentals can also introduce new dangers and the following factors need to be recognised and considered before any agreement is signed:

- some changes in the use of a building may require planning approval or building regulations approval;
- temporary occupants may have less regard for the long-term protection and security of the building than the owner;
- lack of familiarity with the building can result in bad practices, such as the blocking of fire exits and obstruction or removal of firefighting equipment;
- the temporary nature of usage can also be used as an excuse for poor storage practices, the use of hazardous portable heaters, and unsafe working practices such as 'casual' extensions of the electrical installation;
- general fire safety arrangements and means of escape must be adequate for the use to which the building will be put, whether this is temporary or occasional use. Advice may be available from the local fire service;
- temporary occupants may have illicit use of the building in mind, such as manufacture or growth of drugs such as cannabis, storage/distribution of illegal materials, or possibly even terrorist activities;
- any criminally-minded temporary occupants may use their knowledge of the building to attack it at a later date;
- particular care should be taken when allowing leisure or entertainment activities, or filming (movies, television). Fireworks or dangerous stunts for example can cause damage or even destruction to the building. It is important to draw up a detailed contract setting out the allowed and prohibited activities and techniques;
- temporary use must be notified to the insurer prior to the intended occupation, with full details of the proposed use and the period of the lease/short term licence. The insurance policy should be updated to cover temporary activities. Such co-operation between property owners, lessees and insurers can ensure that any additional risk is properly controlled at the outset. Further details see chapter 15

Note: Change of use would be a material alteration of the risk and failure to disclose such information to insurers could invalidate insurance cover.

11.2 Temporary use as Accommodation or Working Place

Some landlords and estate agents seek to maintain the value of their properties (private or public) by limiting vacancy by allowing temporary contractual occupation for housing or work purposes.

Some estate agents specialise in this type of letting and in finding a temporary occupant. Occupancy may be free or at a significantly discounted price.

This special rental contract must specify the duration and stipulate the responsibilities of each party concerning among other things, living conditions and comfort in the building (e.g., installation or maintenance of toilets, bathrooms, toilets, heating, lighting, kitchen, lift, energy consumption)..

Among the occupier's charges, he must regularly check the building and the equipment's, ensure good communication with neighbours and police. Finally, he must regularly inform the owner of the good state of the building, the identity of occupants.

This measure offers significant protection against squatters and vandals and may discourage unwanted intrusions.

It is important that the activities of temporary occupants are monitored throughout their occupation to ensure that illegal, unsafe, or hazardous practices are not introduced. Owners should therefore carry out routine visits to ensure that basic fire safety and security precautions are being followed and any tenancy agreements are being adhered to.

The relevant insurers should be notified and will ensure that the terms of the contract are acceptable in terms of risk. The insurer will of course be kept informed of the conclusion of the occupancy agreement and its termination.

It is equally important to check the building at the cessation of its temporary use. The process set out in Section 2 of this document needs to be implemented in terms of building shut down.

At the end of the temporary lease, the building will be " shut down " as described in Chapter 2.

11.3 Adjacent Property

It is in the interest of persons responsible for any building which is close to an empty building to recognise the potential danger to their own building from criminals attracted to the empty one.

Therefore, occupants of buildings adjacent to an empty building should cooperate and inform each other of incidents they have identified in and around the empty building.

Where there are means of escape from or via adjacent buildings, the means for maintaining access to these routes must be considered and mandatory discussed in advance with the different parties. Sufficient alternative escape routes should be considered. Depending on the situation, the advice of authorities in charge or of the fire service may be required.

12 General Precautions following the Occupation

The problems that can arise in empty buildings may vary according to the occupation of the premises:

12.1 Empty Dwellings

Wherever empty dwellings are located, they are often the target for squatting, vandalism, graffiti, theft of fittings and other crimes. Apart from the loss of rental income and the cost of repairs, the presence of a vandalised building detracts from the value of the neighbourhood, often leading to further vacancies, with a resulting spiral of decay. The solution to the problem is immediate action by the owners to clear and secure buildings as soon as they become vacant, and boarding up where various risk factors, such as the nature and location of the building, suggest it is prudent to do so.

Special attention should be paid to large, abandoned apartment buildings which are more likely to be illegally occupied, squatted, or vandalised.

12.2 Empty Shops/Offices/Commercial Buildings

These can be vulnerable to problems similar to those faced by dwellings but, due to their likely prominent location easily visible, they can also be vulnerable to clandestine and unauthorised fly

posting, or accumulation of junk mail for e.g... The best solution to these problems is to maintain signs of continued occupation and care of the premises.

Special attention should be paid to large abandoned commercial spaces and office buildings which are more likely to be illegally occupied squatted and vandalised.
For information purposes, some of the protective measures developed in section 14 should be taken into consideration.

12.3 Empty Industrial Buildings

These are often located on factory estates. Outside normal working hours, such areas tend to be quiet and secluded, and buildings in such locations are especially vulnerable to the general problems of arson, vandalism and theft of fixtures and fittings. There are also the added problems of the building being used for youth parties, fly tipping, and illegal occupation by itinerant travellers or others.

All these problems, if left unchecked, can create an air of dereliction in the locality and can be very expensive to rectify. To reduce the risk of attack on any empty building, the following measures should be considered:

- removing sources of ignition;
- minimising the amount of combustible materials present, both inside and outside the building;
- minimising the attractiveness of the building or site to vandals or thieves by carefully removing, as far as possible, any contents, fixtures or fittings which may be of value or architectural interest;
- optimising levels of physical security by fitting, for example, 5-lever mortice locks to entrance doors;
- maintaining the efficiency of (or upgrading) protective installations such as fire/intruder alarm systems and sprinkler systems;
- ensuring that any postal or other deliveries are stopped. Letter plate apertures should be sealed, but failing this, all unwanted deliveries should be removed on a regular basis;
- removing graffiti and carrying out repairs to broken windows etc. on a regular and prompt basis;
- retaining internal and external lighting;
- removing unused or derelict vehicles and skips.

The following additional actions may also be considered:

- offering the building on short-term loan (see section 11 Temporary use as accommodation or working place);
- making full use of any living accommodation attached to the premises;
- if appropriate, installing temporary intruder and fire alarm systems – further guidance can be found in section 14.4.

13 Fire Protection

Automatic fire alarm and detection systems and sprinkler systems can provide vital protection against fires, whether accidental or deliberate. Where currently fitted, the option to leave such systems fully operational should be discussed with all interested parties - the owner, the real estates, the insurers and if possible, the local authorities and fire service.
Care should be taken to minimise false or unwanted alarms from fire detection systems maintained within the premises, especially if there is the potential for the transmission of unwanted fire signals to the fire and rescue service from systems connected to a remote monitoring system.

If portable fire extinguishers and/or fire hoses are in place, their continued availability on the premises should also be discussed.

This should be part of the risk analysis. Factors such as future occupancy, use of the building and risk of vandalism should be considered. If it is decided that, on balance, the building and visitors are safer if these devices are not removed, it is essential that they continue to be regularly maintained.

Information regarding local planning policy for empty buildings should be sought from the local planning authority and insurers should be consulted. Good liaison with the police, particularly any local Crime Prevention Department, is desirable (cf. chapter 16).

14 Security Precautions

Defence against crime or illegal intrusion should start at the perimeter of the site on which the building is located. However, many buildings abut directly onto a public area and no outer barrier can be created. In such cases, the exposure of features such as accessible doors and windows needs close attention.

If the premises contain a landscaped area, this should be maintained. Trees and foliage plantings should be properly trimmed to give the appearance of occupancy and/or maintenance of the site and to ensure natural surveillance by neighbourhood.

Surroundings, sides, and front doors are kept clean, undelivered mail and rubbish are regularly removed.

This may be the responsibility of the owners or others, for example a local authority.

14.1 Perimeter Protection

Where an empty building has an open boundary, consideration should be given to improving the perimeter protection. New fencing or perimeter security posts may be used, fencing hired, or earth mounds constructed.

It should be noted that any temporary structure such as a hoarding, wall or scaffolding may require a licence from the local authority planning department, from whom appropriate advice should be sought. A disadvantage of a hoarding for this purpose is that, as well as acting as a deterrent, it can also screen persons who have breached the perimeter security.

Where possible, access should be denied to vehicles to prevent outside areas being used as unofficial car parks or for fly tipping.

14.2 Lighting

Good lighting can deter intruders. The main requirement is for adequate external illumination of the entire site, with higher lighting levels for particularly vulnerable areas such as rear loading bays. Luminaires (light units) should be installed as high as possible and, where vulnerable, be protected from physical damage by stones and other missiles. Where the insurer has agreed that the electricity supply to the internal lighting may remain connected consideration should be given to the benefits of having selected lights connected to sensors or timing devices.

Care should be taken to ensure that seasonal foliage does not reduce the effectiveness of any lighting.

14.3 Physical Security Measures

The most effective way of preventing unauthorised entry is to maintain a high level of physical security. This is best accomplished by retaining existing security features and supplementing these as necessary. The following matters should be considered as a guide.

If owners are in any doubt about what protection is feasible/most suitable, they should seek professional advice, such as services of a competent locksmith – for example, a member of any national locksmith's association – or a contractor experienced in dealing with securing empty buildings.

14.3.1 Doors

The many types of doors likely to be encountered prevents detailed security advice being offered here, but, in general, check that all external doors, or those leading to adjoining buildings are:

- are maintained in good condition;
- have frames adequately anchored to the surrounding masonry or structural framework;
- are securely locked. Locking and/or bolting from the inside is recommended for all but those doors required to gain external access to a building;
- are compliant with any insurer-specified/agreed requirements for door security.

14.3.2 Windows

Glazing is often very vulnerable to breakage and therefore often constitutes the first entry point for intruders. It can be difficult to protect glazing adequately without some external or internal secondary barrier being present, such as shutters, bars, or grilles. However, unless such secondary measures are already fitted, boarding up will often present the most cost-effective option.

In general, check that all external windows, or those leading to adjoining buildings are:

- maintained in good condition;
- have frames adequately anchored to the surrounding masonry or structural framework;
- if opening types, securely locked or internally screwed shut;
- compliant with any insurer-specified/agreed requirements for window security.

14.3.3 Boarding up the Access

a) General practice

It is generally good practice to arrange for the 'boarding up' of most buildings which become empty, particularly if future use/occupation is not imminent. In the case of industrial buildings or buildings in high-risk/isolated areas, boarding up should be considered essential.

'Boarding up' is a phrase often loosely used – it usually means securing openings by means of permanent or removable robust barrier materials, such as steel sheets/grilles, or even masonry.

Polycarbonate, which is much stronger than glass, seems preferable in this respect.

Wooden panels are combustible. Timber boarding should be substantial, exterior-grade plywood of adequate strength to resist attack – at least 18 mm thick. ()

Simple plywood panels are fragile and easily dismantled. Chipboard, with its lower resistance to attack, is not recommended.

Alternatives to plywood are the use of substantial close-gauge wire mesh, shutters, or proprietary hired-in 'boarding' security systems.

Blind panels can hide clandestine activities and occupations. If the panels are an obstacle for intruders, they are also an obstacle for the emergency services; fire brigade recommend not to screw the panels but to nail them.

b) Fittings

All boarding should be suitably secured to the fabric of the building, either on the inside or outside – having regard to what it is intended to do, e.g., prevent external glass breakage and/or prevent entry. The precise fixing method may need adapting to suit the intended future use of the building; for example, will 'permanent' fixing to doors/windows inflict unacceptable damage?

c) Visual impact

Particular care should be taken when considering the boarding up of listed/historic buildings – cf. Appendix A

There are ways in which the visual impact of boarding up can be softened. For example, it can be decorated with a mural (possibly undertaken by a local artist or school, or painted in a colour that allows it to blend in with the rest of the streetscape.

d) Robustness

More robust methods of protection may be appropriate in areas where there is a greater threat to empty buildings. In such areas some doors and windows at an accessible level may be bricked up, but this will inevitably involve more cost and will of course prove difficult to reverse if the building is reoccupied. A more attractive and acceptable alternative that may be available in the local community is to use the services of a company that hires out proprietary systems of tailor-made security screens for windows and doors, often at 24-hours' notice. These screens are very robust,

can be fixed in place and removed with minimal damage to the building, and readily allow for authorised access for maintenance and inspection.

Whatever method of protection is used, it is important to ensure that all letter plate apertures, gaps around doors or windows and any orifices through which waste or flammable liquids could be poured, are protected by being suitably sealed.

e) Exemption

In some areas where the level of security and surveillance is high, it may be acceptable not to protect windows and display cases (e.g., in a shopping centre or busy residential area). Such an approach maintains the appearance of the location (an important factor in the case of buildings for sale or lease). Another method is to maintain the appearance of occupancy through mock exhibitions.

14.4 Why Electronics Systems

Empty buildings are prone to various common problems, such as deterioration of the fabric, damp, escape of water, fly-tipping, fly-posting and external vandalism etc. Many of these problems can be eliminated or reduced by good management, including regular inspections and appropriate maintenance and repair. However, empty buildings are often additionally at risk of being accessed by trespassers or intruders for various activities, such as squatting, illegal trading (including drugs), parties, internal vandalism and theft of contents or fixtures and fittings. There may also be a significant risk of partial or complete destruction by fire, particularly as a result of arson.

Physical security is often put in place to deter or hinder unauthorised access, but this may not be practical or sufficient in every case to prevent intruders gaining access. Therefore, some means of alerting the owners to unauthorised access will often be necessary to fully manage the risks mentioned above. This usually involves the use of an intruder alarm system although sometimes a remotely monitored video surveillance system (VSS) may also prove suitable.

14.4.1 Intruder Alarm Systems

Intruder alarm systems can be considered under two headings, namely 'conventional' and 'temporary' alarm systems.

Conventional Intruder Alarm Systems

Many buildings in normal use are fitted with a permanently installed, mains-powered, internal intruder alarm system. To install such an alarm system in a building once it is empty can involve considerable expense and delay. Therefore, wherever possible, as a building becomes vacant, any existing alarm system should be formally taken over by the new owners and maintained/upgraded as appropriate to provide ongoing intruder detection.

Conventional alarm systems are usually installed, maintained and monitored by installing companies and alarm receiving centres (ARCs) that have been third-party certificated by an inspection organisation. This certification is usually supported by insurers and other interested bodies, including the police, as a means of ensuring that relevant national and European standards are complied with for alarm system design, maintenance, ARC monitoring, security procedures, record keeping and staff security vetting.

Indeed, it may be the case that police rules require independent certification of the installation company, maintenance company and/or monitoring company if the system is to be eligible for a routine emergency police response to activations.

Regardless of whether a system qualifies for police response, it is essential to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to respond to any alarm faults/activations by the appointment of suitable in-house keyholders or commercial premises keyholders (a security company). For further guidance on the appointment of keyholders, please refer to the CFPA document *Guidance on Keyholder Selection and Duties, 4:2010/S.*

Temporary Intruder Alarm Systems

Where an empty building has no alarm system, or it proves impractical to take over and use an existing system – for example, if previous owners have removed or damaged components, or the necessary mains power supply is no longer available – it is often possible to install a temporary alarm unit or system.

Temporary alarm systems usually comprise a portable control/power unit and various wire-free intruder alarm sensors, although some use various forms of audio or visual detection and/or verification. Fire detection sensors can be added to some systems. Temporary alarms are designed to be powered by a battery, although mains power can sometimes be utilised, if present on site. Low battery power indications are usually sent to the ARC.

It is also recommended to install additional on-sites sirens/sounders.

It may be that there is a wide variety of specialist companies providing temporary alarm products/services locally but there are few relevant standards that specifically apply to such systems. Consequently the sector is not as well regulated as the conventional alarm system market.

Before ordering a temporary intruder alarm system it should be checked if national regulations are given and if so if these regulation fit the requirements of the interested parties.

Owners and insurers need to establish what action is taken when a temporary alarm system activates. These systems are unlikely to qualify for a routine emergency police response even where such a response is available to conventional alarm systems. Some system providers undertake to telephone the local police via normal telephone lines to alert them to alarm activations, but this practice may not be acceptable to the police in which case owners must put in place adequate and reliable arrangements for private or commercial keyholders (i.e. a security company) to attend the site to investigate or rectify the cause of any alarm activation or fault.

If arrangements are made for owners' own keyholders to attend activations, they should be cautioned to do so with due regard for their safety, and advised to:

- attend in pairs
- let someone know where they are going and when they can be expected to make contact/return
- carry mobile phones
- be aware that if there are signs of a break-in, or suspicion that intruders are present, they should call for police assistance via the emergency telephone service.

Many commercial security companies provide a response and keyholding service and building owners often choose to employ such services to avoid some of the difficulties that can arise with the use of in-house keyholders. Again, the CFPA publication, *Guidance on Keyholder Selection and Duties,* provides further information and advice. Owners should ensure that any company employed to provide such a service meets with the full approval of their insurers.

Appendix to this document provides a checklist of useful characteristics of temporary intruder alarm systems. While temporary alarms are a cost-effective and proven way of providing protection against intrusion into empty buildings, their effectiveness will depend on many factors. Owners should therefore satisfy themselves as to the suitability and effectiveness of any system under consideration by comparing the system to the checklist given in the Appendix.

14.4.2 Video Surveillance Systems (VSS)

VSS takes many forms, but to be effective, a system needs to be monitored so that unauthorised persons approaching or entering the building may be challenged and/or a keyholder or response service dispatched to attend.

VSS can be considered under two headings, 'conventional' and 'temporary'.

Conventional VSS

The cost of installing a new, conventional, monitored VSS to protect an empty building, particularly for a short period, will usually be prohibitive. However, in some cases it may be possible to take over a system which has already been installed in the building, or to arrange for a system covering an adjacent site/public space, such as a town or shopping centre system, to monitor the empty building.

The complexity of conventional VSS is such that they should only be assumed to be effective where installed, maintained and monitored by companies that have been third-party certificated by an inspection organisation, assuming a certification scheme is available. As with intruder alarm systems, this certification is generally supported by insurers and other interested bodies, usually including the police, as a means of ensuring that relevant standards are complied with for system design, maintenance, monitoring, security procedures, record-keeping and staff security vetting. Existing systems without such certification should be evaluated by a reputable consultant to establish if cost effective action is feasible and desirable to optimise their potential.

Temporary VSS

If arrangements cannot be made for a suitable existing system to monitor the empty building, a temporary VSS system may be the only cost-effective solution if visual evidence of activities at an empty building is required. Devices are currently available which consist of an enclosure housing a battery power supply, passive infrared movement detector, camera with infra-red illumination, GSM unit and a key switch.

A few specialist companies can provide temporary VSS products/services. Again, as with temporary alarm systems, there are few relevant standards that specifically apply to such systems. Consequently the sector is not well regulated, if at all.

Some providers undertake to telephone the local police via normal telephone lines to alert them to visually verified system activations. The chances of this resulting in a police response are increased if the monitoring operation can persuade the police operator that a criminal act has taken place or is likely to take place. Note, however that in many localities, trespass is regarded as a civil, rather than criminal, offence.

As with temporary intruder alarm systems, it is essential that owners put in place adequate and reliable arrangements for private or commercial keyholders to attend the VSS protected site to investigate or rectify the cause of any system activation or fault.

14.4.3 Conclusion

Wherever practical, it will usually be preferable to utilise or adapt an existing conventional electronic security system for the monitoring of an empty building. However, where this cannot be achieved, temporary electronic security systems can be an effective means of monitoring, particularly when coupled with appropriate physical security measures and suitable deterrent warning signs on site.

The main advantages of installing a temporary electronic security system compared with a conventional system are:

- speed of installation
- no requirement for mains power
- no requirement for a telephone line
- reduced costs – temporary systems are usually hired by the week/month
- ease of relocating units/detectors as a result of wire-free technology
- commercial providers can provide services such as response to system activations, regular site inspections, waste clearance and boarding-up services etc.

There are a number of companies that specialise in the provision of site surveys, installation, maintenance, monitoring and response to temporary electronic security systems in vacant buildings. While most of these companies do not meet all of the traditional standards/inspection body 'benchmarks' familiar in the field of conventional electronic security systems, most are dealing with the specific issues relating to the protection of vacant property on a daily basis. They are therefore likely to have the expertise and resources available to adequately deal with most problems encountered.

14.5 Manned Guarding Services

Security personnel can be used to provide two different levels of service – permanent guards and mobile patrols.

Security services and their staff must comply with the relevant national regulations concerning watching and security services and be agreed for watching activities. Normal health, safety and welfare regulations are applicable.

Owners and insurers need to establish that guarding services comply with the regulations and standards applying to the locality in which the building is situated.

Permanent guards

Sometimes known as 'resident' or 'static' guards, this type of service provides a continuous security presence at the protected building. This type of service is to be preferred for large commercial or industrial buildings which are expected to be sold or reoccupied.

Permanent guards can be provided either by a contract company or can be directly employed.

If a contractor is to be utilised, it is imperative to select a company whose procedures comply with any appropriate local and/or national standards (see below). In the case of empty buildings having only one guard, the guard must be able to communicate either with the police or their own control centre to enable them to call for assistance. Appropriate instructions should be prepared which specify a clearly defined area of patrol, and clear assignment directions should be given (see below). Additionally, specifiers should ensure that the selected company has guards who are adequately trained, fully screened and well supervised.

Care should be taken to ensure that comprehensive patrol routes are established and that a mechanism exists for checking that any patrols are correctly carried out. Proprietary systems are available to assist with this area.

Mobile patrol services

Certain security service companies provide a patrol service where a guard will visit premises a specified number of times each day, at random intervals. While mainly acting as a deterrent, such patrols may provide an acceptable minimum level of security for certain types of empty buildings. In some cases, security contractors also offer a keyholding or response service where they will respond as a keyholder when required by the owner, emergency services, utilities or local authority.

Guarding standards

In many countries special guarding standards are required to be fulfilled. Owners and insurers need to establish that guarding services comply with the regulations and standards applying to the locality in which the building is situated.

Licensing

In many countries, contract guards are required to hold a security licence issued by a licensing body, police, or other authority. Owners and insurers need to establish that guarding services comply with the regulations and standards applying to the locality in which the building is situated.

15 Insurers' Requirements

Insurers must be informed of any material change in the circumstances of an insured building, otherwise insurance cover could be invalidated. It is therefore essential that the insurer or, (if applicable) the broker is informed immediately when a building becomes empty, and ideally as soon as the policyholder becomes aware of the intention. This is an important part of managing the shutdown of the building. Furthermore, in certain insurance markets, compliance with, and disclosure of, any advice given by the emergency services following an arson assessment of the

premises will be considered by insurers as material to any claim made for loss or damage connected with the change in the use of the building.

In many cases, the insurance cover for the empty building will be dependent upon an agreed minimum level of physical, electronic, or manned security commensurate with the perceived risk and the duration that the building is expected to be unoccupied.

In addition, insurers will probably ask for the following simple but effective precautions to be taken from the outset:

- ensuring that all keys are accounted for and, if any key is missing, changing the locks immediately;
- preserving integrity of any fire main, sprinkler installation, intruder alarm, automatic fire alarm and other electrical or electronic security system, including continuing inspection and testing arrangements, together with existing maintenance contracts;
- ensuring integrity of lightning protection systems, including inspection and maintenance requirements;
- disconnecting/isolating all services/utilities at the perimeter of the building or at another suitable location (other than those required to operate fire and security protection or for other essential services, such as those required for staff welfare, lighting or to prevent freezing of sprinkler pipework and control valves). Any disconnection/isolation (or locking off where appropriate) should be undertaken in such a way that reconnection is not easily achievable by intruders;
- where applicable, maintaining the temperature within the building at or above 4°C at all times to avoid frost damage to any sprinkler system or other essential water services ;
- draining down all water tanks, pipes, and apparatus, except those which are specifically agreed as needing to remain in use;
- immediately removing from the building all combustible materials such as furniture, waste, litter, flammable liquids, wooden pallets etc. Any temporary buildings and skips not in regular use should also be removed from the site, as should any item that could be used as a missile;
- sealing up letter plate apertures or, if impracticable, fitting the rear of the aperture with an enclosed metal box, bolted in place, then frequently removing any materials delivered;
- properly draining and purging tanks, pressure vessels and pipework containing combustible or explosive liquids or gases and implementing approved safety measures to minimise the risk of ignition or explosion from residual vapours (note: the existence of any additional information and/or regulations on this subject applicable to the locality in which the building is situated should be investigated);
- maintaining perimeter fence security and repairing any damage found during routine inspections as a matter of urgency;
- conducting regular site inspections (to be carried out by an appropriate and responsible person) to check the general condition of the building including signs for damage or detoriation of the external building envelope (such as windows, doors or roof coverings which may allow for water ingress following rain or snow) , the integrity of all security measures and that no accumulation of litter, unsolicited mail or external waste has occurred. The frequency of such inspections will depend upon the building's vulnerability, but weekly is a typical minimum frequency. Details and observations from such visits should be recorded in a log or register, with any noted defects/damage attended to promptly.

16 Liaison with the Police

Empty buildings should be managed in such a way that the demands on police resources are not increased due to avoidable problems. The police may be able to help with specialist crime prevention advice and knowledge of crime patterns in the area. If all parties work together, risks can be minimised and the resource demands on everyone can be reduced. It may be necessary to provide an up-to-date list of building keyholders to the police.

17 Legal Liability

National and/or local legislation may impose on those responsible for properties a duty of care to visitors and trespassers. Depending upon the circumstances of an accident suffered by a visitor or trespasser in an empty building, the owner of an empty building could be legally liable for the death of or injury to that person. Children may view an empty building as an interesting and exciting playground and it should be noted that where trespass by children is likely, it is necessary to take stricter precautions to prevent their access.

To help discharge the duty of care to trespassers the following measures should be taken:

- the building should be well secured, especially against access by children;
- if there are dangers within the building, for example due to structural defects, contamination, fragile roofs or security measures such as razor wire, suitable warning notices should be displayed around the site;
- the use of any guard dog(s) should be strictly controlled in accordance with any legislation applicable to the locality in which the building is situated. For example, it may be required that notices warning that guard dogs are present are posted at all likely building entrances.

Authorised visitors such as surveyors, security guards, building contractors, prospective purchasers and local authority officers may need to access empty buildings. Arrangements must therefore be made to ensure that they are not placed at undue risk while undertaking their duties. To help discharge the duty of care to visitors, the following measures should be taken:

- suitable warnings should be given regarding specific dangers, such as structural defects, isolated services, and contamination etc;
- adequate lighting should be provided;
- barriers should be provided around dangerous and unsafe areas;
- details of those visiting should be recorded;
- visitors on their own should carry either a lone worker's alarm or a mobile telephone and ensure that they register or log in with a responsible person prior to entry and on return.

Those responsible for employees working in empty buildings should also consider these measures when preparing any risk assessments, required by applicable regulations.

The local authority building control department or similar controlling authority may have a variety of powers to require remedial works where structures become dangerous to the public. Owners of an empty building have a duty of care to maintain the building so that it does not become a hazard or a danger to the public. This would include taking adequate measures to prevent unauthorised access/use.

18 Management Checklist

18.1	Administration	Yes	No	N/A	Action required	Due date	Sign on completion
18.1.1	Is there a plan controlling the shutdown?						
18.1.2	Have the building's insurers been notified?						
18.1.3	Are routine inspections planned?						
18.1.4	Has a redirection of mail been set up and any letter plate aperture(s) sealed?						
18.1.5	Have keyholders been nominated?						
18.1.6	Have the local police and any monitoring centre been given keyholder details (as required)?						
18.1.7	Has the local fire service been given keyholder details (as required)?						
18.1.8	Has the advice of the local police been sought where available?						
18.1.9	Has the local planning authority (or similar body) been consulted regarding any proposed external security alterations?						

18.2	Housekeeping and Health and Safety	Yes	No	N/A	Action required	Due date	Sign on completion
18.2.1	Has a risk assessment been done?						
18.2.2	Has the health and safety of visitors and potential trespassers been addressed?						
18.2.3	Has the health and safety of security staff been addressed?						
18.2.4	Has all refuse been removed from the interior?						
18.2.5	Has all refuse been removed from the external site areas?						
18.2.6	Have any unnecessary furnishings and furniture been removed?						
18.2.7	Have any temporary buildings and skips been removed from the site?						
18.2.8	Have all non-essential services been disconnected or isolated?						

18.3	Fire Safety	Yes	No	N/A	Action required	Due date	Sign on completion
18.3.1	If any essential water services are required, have these been provided?						
18.3.2	Have any flammable liquids and combustible materials been removed from the building?						
18.3.3	Is there an automatic fire detection system?						
18.3.4	Is there an automatic sprinkler installation?						
18.3.5	Are fire hoses installed?						
18.3.6	Are there portable fire extinguishers?						
18.3.7	If there are means of escape from or through adjacent property, have the means for maintaining access to these routes been discussed (where advice available)?						

18.4	Physical Security	Yes	No	N/A	Action required	Due date	Sign on completion
18.4.1	Have any potentially vulnerable access points been suitably protected?						
18.4.2	Are all perimeter barriers in good repair?						
18.4.3	Are existing doors and door hardware adequate?						
18.4.4	Are existing windows in good repair?						
18.4.5	Are accessible windows adequately protected?						

18.5	Other Security Measures	Yes	No	N/A	Action required	Due date	Sign on completion
18.5.1	Is there an intruder alarm installed?						
18.5.2	Is there a manned security presence?						
18.5.3	Are all keys accounted for?						
18.5.4	Is there external security lighting?						
18.5.5	Is interior lighting in place?						
18.5.6	Is there a method of recording authorised visitors?						

Annex - Historic Buildings

Empty historic buildings can present particular attractions to intruders. Their historic associations, opportunities for concealment, valuable internal fittings, and remote or secluded locations are among the factors that make them especially vulnerable.

The value of the building and its fixtures and fittings should be carefully considered in relation to the precautions proposed to protect them, and specialist advice may be required. At the same time, historic value should be respected in the physical measures taken. It is always preferable to maintain the historic integrity of the fabric and the removal of value items to a place of safe keeping should only be contemplated as a last resort, weighing up the likelihood of theft or vandalism against the risks of damage and loss associated with removal and storage.

If fixtures are collectable, possess historic or antique value, are made of intrinsically valuable materials or are vulnerable to vandalism, this should prompt higher levels of security.

Security precautions

As door and window frames may be historically important, the use of non-return screws (drive screws) or ribbed nails to directly secure them, or to secure boarding to them, may lead to unnecessary damage. The use of plastic security films is not recommended for historic glass as the films may prove difficult to remove without damaging the glass.

Routine changing of locks should not be carried out on historic doors, though additional rim locks may be fitted where necessary. In general, surface-mounted bolts, hasps and staples are preferred, as they cause the least damage to historic joinery.

Manned patrols accompanied by trained guard dogs can be very effective, but dogs should be carefully controlled inside empty buildings to prevent damage to decorations. The provisions of any applicable legislation must also be borne in mind ().

For historic buildings, the best means of protection while they are empty is probably to have a resident caretaker, site guard and/or an intruder alarm permanently occupied control station.

Maintenance

Routine maintenance and clearing of gutters and vegetation should continue to be carried out in the normal way and not neglected. Deserted interiors – especially roof spaces, towers, and spires in empty historic buildings – can easily become infested with pigeons or other birds, leading to health hazards, rodent infestation, and general acceleration of decay. Ventilators in empty buildings should be fitted with fly mesh and disused flues should be kept clear of nesting materials and provided with ventilator caps.

Heating

To prevent dampness in an empty historic building, intermittent low-level heating should be provided via a permanent fixed heating installation wherever possible.

With insurer's consent, safe forms of temporary heating may be agreed, but not where it may pose a fire risk or introduce higher levels of humidity.

In historic buildings the risk of restricting ventilation and/or drying out also needs to be recognised, with suitable ventilators provided to prevent dry rot outbreaks.

Temporary use

The conservation and care of empty historic buildings is often furthered by making some use of them. Examples might include temporary tenants, provided they are suitably selected and vetted, or occasional opening to the public. Public openings may encourage residents to feel involved in the future/wellbeing of the building and thus assist in the reporting of problems. Such openings may also provide the interiors with a beneficial intermittent airing.

European Guidelines

Fire

Guideline No 1 F - Internal fire protection control
Guideline No 2 F - Panic & emergency exit devices
Guideline No 3 F - Certification of thermographers
Guideline No 4 F - Introduction to qualitative fire risk assessment
Guideline No 5 F - Guidance signs, emergency lighting and general lighting
Guideline No 6 F - Fire safety in care homes
Guideline No 7 F - Safety distance between waste containers and buildings
Guideline No 8 F - Preventing arson – information to young people
Guideline No 9 F - Fire safety in restaurants
Guideline No 10 F - Smoke alarms in the home
Guideline No 11 F - Recommended numbers of fire protection trained staff
Guideline No 12 F - Fire safety basics for hot work operatives
Guideline No 13 F - Fire protection documentation
Guideline No 14 F - Fire protection in information technology facilities
Guideline No 15 F - Fire safety in guest harbours and marinas
Guideline No 16 F - Fire protection in offices
Guideline No 17 F - Fire safety in farm buildings
Guideline No 18 F - Fire protection on chemical manufacturing sites
Guideline No 19 F - Fire safety engineering concerning evacuation from buildings
Guideline No 20 F - Fire safety in camping sites
Guideline No 21 F - Fire prevention on construction sites
Guideline No 22 F - Wind turbines – Fire protection guideline
Guideline No 23 F - Securing the operational readiness of fire control system
Guideline No 24 F - Fire safe homes
Guideline No 25 F - Emergency plan
Guideline No 26 F - Fire protection of temporary buildings on construction sites
Guideline No 27 F - Fire safety in apartment buildings
Guideline No 28 F - Fire safety in laboratories
Guideline No 29 F - Protection of paintings: transports, exhibition and storage
Guideline No 30 F - Managing fire safety in historic buildings
Guideline No 31 F - Protection against self-ignition end explosions in handling and storage of silage and fodder in farms
Guideline No 32 F - Treatment and storage of waste and combustible secondary raw materials
Guideline No 33 F - Evacuation of people with disabilities
Guideline No 34 F - Fire safety measures with emergency power supply
Guideline No 35 F - Fire safety in warehouses
Guideline No 36 F - Fire prevention in large tents
Guideline No 37 F - Photovoltaic systems: recommendations on loss prevention
Guideline No 38 F - Fire safety recommendations for short-term rental accommodations
Guideline No 39 F - Fire protection in schools
Guideline No 40 F - Procedure to certify CFPA-E Fire Safety Specialists in Building Design
Guideline No 41 F - Safety Instructions for the use and charging of small and medium size lithium ion powered devices
Guideline No 42 F - Guidance document for Selection of Fire Protection Systems
Guideline No 43 F - Foam Concentrates – The Selection Criteria

Natural hazards

Guideline No 1 N - Protection against flood
Guideline No 2 N - Business resilience – An introduction to protecting your business
Guideline No 3 N - Protection of buildings against wind damage
Guideline No 4 N - Lighting protection
Guideline No 5 N - Managing heavy snow loads on roofs
Guideline No 6 N - Forest fires
Guideline No 7 N - Demountable / Mobile flood protection systems
Guideline No 8 N - Ensuring supplies of firefighting water in extreme weather conditions
Guideline No 9 N - Protection against hail damage
Guideline No 10 N - Heavy rain and flash flood prevention and protection

Security

Guideline No 1 S - Arson document
Guideline No 2 S - Protection of empty buildings
Guideline No 3 S - Security systems for empty buildings
Guideline No 4 S - Guidance on keyholder selections and duties
Guideline No 5 S - Security guidelines for museums and showrooms
Guideline No 6 S - Security guidelines emergency exit doors in non-residential premises
Guideline No 7 S - Developing evacuation and salvage plans for works of art and heritage buildings
Guideline No 8 S - Security in schools
Guideline No 9 S - Recommendation for the control of metal theft
Guideline No 10 S - Protection of business intelligence
Guideline No11 S - Cyber security for small and medium-sized enterprises
Guideline No 12 S - Security Guidelines for Businesses
Guideline No 13 S - Cybersecurity Basic Level – Basic IT Security
Guideline No 14 S - Security Report – Rental, Storage and Exhibition of Art Objects

Comments and corrective actions:

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