



Idle and vacant properties are a common occurrence resulting from plant closings, layoffs, strikes or slowdowns that frequently result when the economy takes a downturn. These properties are often neglected and have increased susceptibility to losses caused by arson, weather related events, burglary, vandalism and malicious mischief.

Fire is the greatest concern and every effort should be made to eliminate combustible loading and to maintain fire protection systems in working order. Frozen water lines are also a significant cause of loss when building heat is not maintained. And some vacant buildings have completely burned to the ground due to the sprinkler systems being shut off to prevent the sprinkler lines from freezing.

As these facilities are often neglected, standard loss prevention measures are not implemented during extreme weather events such as flood, surface water, freezing temperatures, and wind. These abandoned buildings are not constantly attended and are rarely provided with the proper preventative measures to combat their respective natural hazard exposures.

The following precautions should be considered for idle and vacant properties:

Maintain Sprinkler Systems Active:

- Automatic sprinkler systems should be kept in service whenever possible.
- Alarms should be monitored at a constantly attended location unless there is 24-hour security on site.
- Maintain building temperatures above 40°F (4.5°C) to prevent freezing of wet sprinkler systems.
- If it is not feasible to maintain a minimum temperature of 40°F (4.5°C), then convert wet sprinkler systems to dry-pipe or non-freeze systems.

- Conduct required maintenance, inspection and testing to ensure reliable operation.
- Lock and supervise sprinkler control valves to deter arsonists from tampering with control valves.

Eliminate Unnecessary Combustible Loading:

- Eliminate or reduce combustible materials stored inside buildings as these materials provide ready fuel for fire. Remove all waste and clean oil/dust deposits. Remove all ignitable liquids.

- Eliminate or reduce combustible yard storage which may unnecessarily expose building structures. Keep any remaining combustible yard storage away from perimeter fencing, buildings and plant to reduce the potential for malicious ignition.
- Maintain vegetation trimmed, especially around fire service equipment to insure clear access by emergency responders.

Ignition Sources:

- Restrict hot work and smoking. Use a formal hot work permit system when this activity is absolutely necessary. Isolate all non-essential utilities such as electricity and gas, if not required for building heat.

Contractor Management:

- Supervise outside contractors closely, especially when properties are being idled.

Security:

- Provide external security features to deter potential arsonists, burglars, vandals and persons with malicious intent.
- Provide adequate lighting to cover all sides of the building, including parking areas.
- Provide quality fencing around the property with locked gates.
- Eliminate potential hiding places and trim or remove foliage that obstructs the view of the building from the street.
- Provide quality locks to all doors, windows, roof hatches, etc.
- Provide security bars on vulnerable windows or securely board or block them over.

Burglar Alarms & Watch Service:

- Consider providing a burglar alarm system with suitable intrusion devices to protect buildings/rooms storing valuable contents that is susceptible to theft, in localities with high crime rates or a history of burglary, or to prevent against arson.
- Monitor alarms remotely. An alternative is to provide watch service with random recorded rounds. Provide suitable training and supervision to ensure effectiveness. Familiarize any on-site security personnel with the operation of fire protection equipment and alarm systems.

Inspections:

- Conduct regular inspections of the building and perimeter to check for breaches in security. Frequency of inspection will depend on site but should be at least weekly. Rectify any security breaches as soon as possible. Inspection details should be recorded.

Access Control:

- Contact numbers should be posted at the main entrance. Visitors should be escorted and should be required to sign in and out.

Local Authorities:

- Inform the local police and fire department when a property becomes unoccupied.
- Provide the fire department with keys for easy access and conduct preplanning as required.
- Familiarize the fire department with all automatic protection and alarm systems that will be kept in service.
- Provide emergency contact numbers.

Heat:

- Provide adequate heating to prevent freezing of fire protection equipment and other equipment and to prevent against rapid deterioration of the building structure or contents.
- Heating systems should be routinely inspected. Consider monitoring temperature remotely.

Detection:

- Consider installing detection systems in areas not provided with automatic sprinklers when the combustible loading is appreciable and the combustibles cannot be eliminated or the condition is expected to exist for an extended duration.

Strikes:

- Special planning is required to deal with strikes, particularly when there is a high probability for violence or malicious property damage. Key responsibilities and duties need to be initially defined. Manpower limitations, site access, communication methods, required provisions, etc. must be planned for in advance.

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