

Unoccupied Properties

Properties are more vulnerable to damage if left unoccupied. This is true even if the vacancy is only temporary. Poor supervision, lack of appropriate security and the misplaced belief that there is nothing inside worth stealing are all contributory factors.

Fires in vacant commercial properties are well documented, but the risk to residential properties should not be underestimated. Theft, wilful damage, vandalism and intrusion by squatters are also known risks. Unoccupied buildings, unless managed appropriately, can suffer significant fire or water damage due to a lack of maintained services.

The degree of risk varies with locality, neighbourhood, crime history, security, general management, length of unoccupancy and perceived attractiveness of the premises' contents. Consideration should be given to the following:

Neighbourhood/Locality

- Check crime levels in the area and liaise with the local police's crime-prevention unit
- Are the premises in an area with a Neighbourhood Watch scheme?
- Is the property in a secluded or isolated location?
- Who is likely to venture into the grounds, e.g. youths or squatters?
- Take steps to hinder access and deter entry
- Don't allow the premises to appear empty and unsupervised
- Keep lawns/hedges tidy; maintain a cared-for appearance
- Promptly identify and repair any damage
- Carry out regular checks of the premises, inside and out; monitor for signs of vandalism or attempted entry
- For certain areas, e.g. where crime levels are high, a 'lived in' appearance may be unworkable if the appropriate level of security requires boarding up windows/doors



Fire and arson risk

- Remove rubbish – both internally and externally – together with unnecessary furniture and combustible items
- Seal up the letter box
- Houses in high-risk areas may need all the contents removing to deny fuel for malicious fire raisers

Internal services

- Ensure all but essential services are either turned off or disconnected
- Drain down water and turn off gas and electricity – unless essential for maintaining heating, fire systems, security lights or alarms
- Consider the removal of high-value services, such as recently installed boilers, and develop a refurbishment policy of not fitting new boilers in empty properties until just before occupation

Fences, sheds, garages, outbuildings

- Repair breaches in fences and hedges
- Secure garden gates
- Sheds, garages and outbuildings should be securely locked/padlocked
- Tools in sheds could be used as implements for entry – if the property is empty, then sheds, etc. should be emptied to remove tools that could be used to force entry; remove any remaining items of value
- Remove all ladders from site

Contents

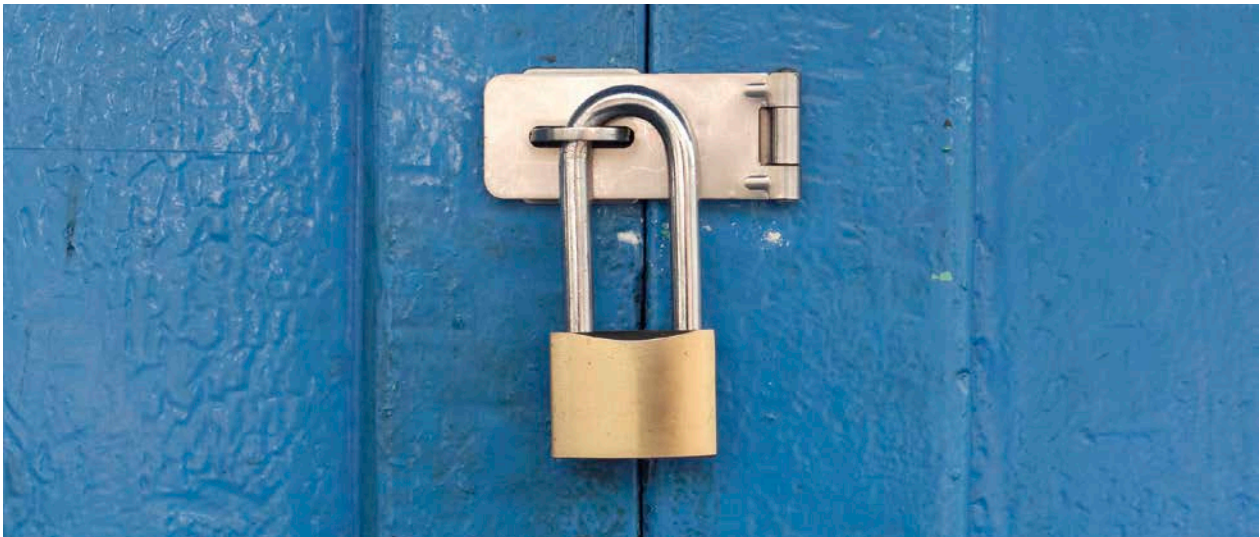
- Remove contents of value, retaining only those needed to maintain a normal appearance
- It is usually advisable to remove all contents to reduce the fire risk
- Roof voids should be cleared of debris and potential access points checked

Intruder alarms

- Consider the installation of appropriate intruder-alarm systems for larger, higher-risk premises
- High-risk properties left unoccupied for extensive periods might benefit from an alarm fitted with a secure, monitored remote, connected to an approved Alarm Receiving Centre manned 24 hours a day

Windows and doors

- Ground-floor and vulnerable upper-floor windows should be secured with key-operated window locks or screwed shut securely
- In higher-crime areas, boarding up vulnerable and easily accessible external windows may be necessary
- Doors should be fitted with appropriate deadlocking devices appropriate to door/frame type



For more information please contact us at social.housing@zurichmunicipal.com