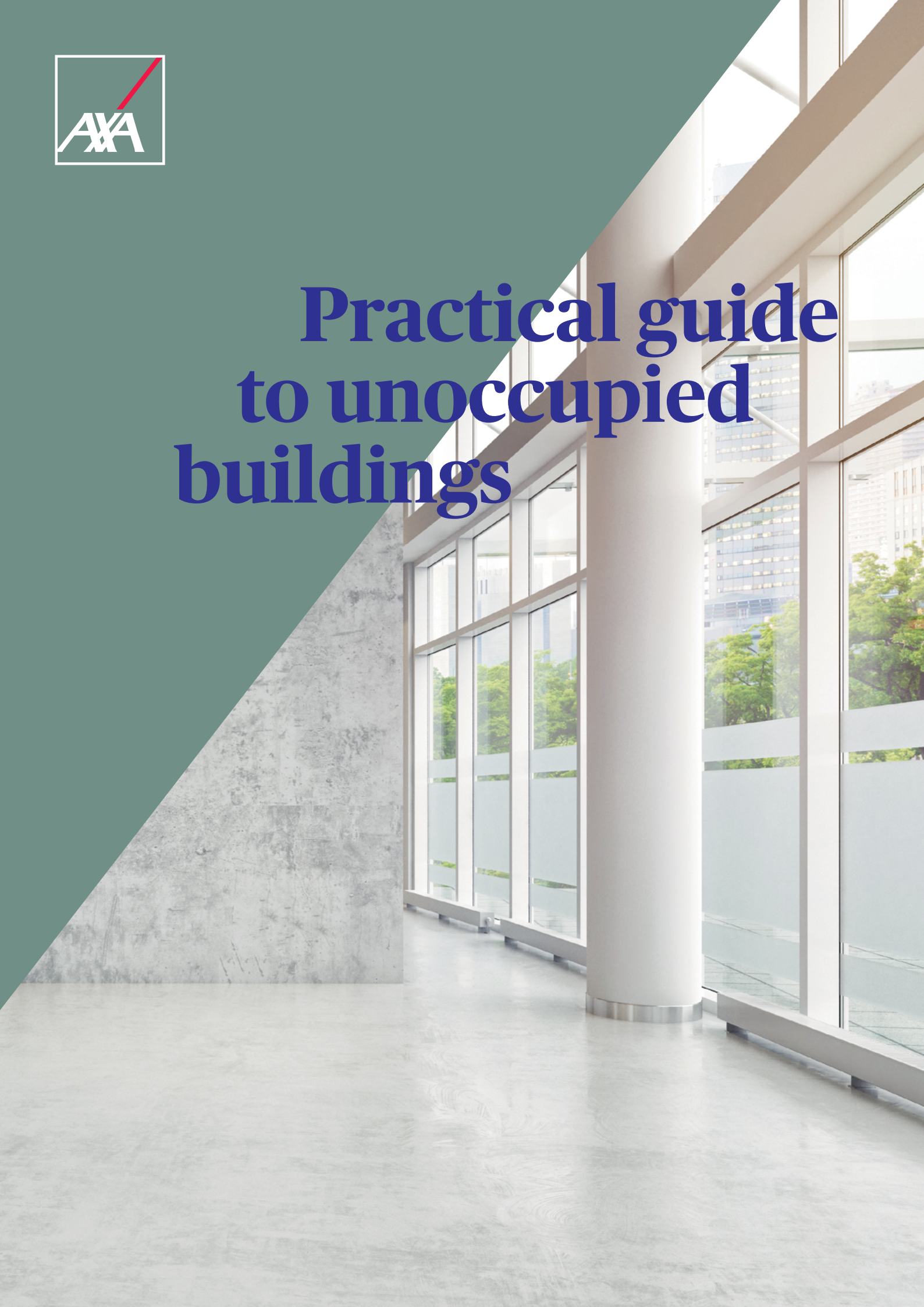




Practical guide to unoccupied buildings





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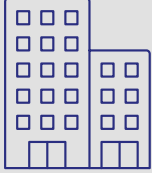
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Introduction

Unoccupied buildings are a constant feature in the UK property market – be it through a downturn in the economy or a change in use or attractiveness of the building's location.

Unoccupied buildings are a potential attraction to children or arsonists. This guide is designed to assist the property owner in protecting their most valuable asset – their building.



Problems encountered by the property owner

Unoccupied buildings can suffer many problems.

The following are a number of problems the property owner may be required to protect against:

- Fire
- Wilful damage
- Theft of contents
- Vandalism
- Theft/damage to building services
- Squatters
- Fly tipping
- Establishment of travellers' encampments
- Injury to third parties – particularly children
- Theft of building materials – ie lead from roofs
- Deterioration of building fabric through water ingress.



People exposed to injury by unoccupied buildings

There are a number of third parties who are vulnerable to injury in unoccupied buildings.

The property owner has a duty of care to not just third parties, but also those trespassing:

- Employees undertaking building inspections
- Contractors
- Surveyors
- Estate agents
- Prospective purchasers
- Children (who may see unoccupied buildings as adventure playgrounds)
- Vagrants
- Intruders.



Where do you start?

It is essential, that before any money is committed to protect the building during a period of unoccupancy, a quick and basic risk assessment is undertaken:

- What am I looking to protect?
- How could intruders attempt to gain entry?
- Are there other unoccupied buildings in the vicinity – have they had problems?
- What could anyone steal?
- What could someone use to start a fire?
- What could cause injury to someone entering the building?
- Where would contractors store their materials if the building was being renovated?



What should be my aim?

- Deter the would-be intruder by presenting a difficult and discouraging site
- Delay the intruder by making entry as difficult as possible
- Deny the intruder either any advantage or access to the key parts of the building once entry has been gained.



How do I do it?

The following will assist in protecting the unoccupied building:

Building inspections

It is essential that regular inspections of unoccupied buildings are undertaken to ensure that the building remains secure, and vandals or severe weather has not caused damage.

The inspections must be undertaken at intervals not exceeding seven days, with each visit being recorded, preferably electronically to provide an audit trail.

All incidents or damage must also be recorded, together with action taken to remedy the incident/damage.

Perimeter security

- Ensure any boundary fence is in good repair
- Secure gates with close shackle padlocks complying with a minimum-security standard of CEN Grade 4
- Collect combustible materials from around the perimeter and remove from site
- Consider blocking vehicle access to site by utilising concrete road blockers – this can be effective in preventing fly tipping (care needs to be taken to ensure access for emergency services, particularly the fire brigade)
- Cut back vegetation from around the building
- External lighting should also be directed outwards from the building – lighting should be operated on time switches or by motion sensors.

External building protection

The level of protection to be considered for the external fabric of the building may be dependent on the location of the building and imposition of planning restrictions. Historically, doors and windows have been protected by timber ply board, which not only looks unsightly, but they are also vulnerable to damage and easy removal.

There are also now a range of companies that offer dedicated protection to vacant properties who have experience in professionally protecting these buildings. The equipment required is leased meaning you only pay for the period you are protecting the building. Therefore you don't have the large capital expenditure as soon as the building becomes empty.

Protections to be considered include:

- Secure external doors by protecting with proprietary locking steel screens which fit over existing doors. Alternatively in high-risk areas, secure openings with brick or blockwork internally*
- Protect glazed panels with perforated steel screens or alternatively brick or blockwork*
- Block other openings that could be used by intruders to gain access or allow lighted matter to be passed through eg, ventilation ducts, delivery shutters, utility duct covers, boiler room access panels
- The entry door to the premises must be secured by a minimum of one British Standard or EN approved mortise deadlock and boxed striking plate, or alternatively, a CEN Grade 4 close shackle padlock and appropriate locking bar
- All keys operating locks fitted to external doors must be accounted for. If any key is missing, the lock must be changed immediately
- Letter boxes should be sealed to prevent the accumulation of junk mail, free newspapers and the like if the building is to remain unoccupied for more than a few weeks. Alternatively, a safety letterbox should be provided (ie fully enclosed box or externally mounted letterbox).

* Where timber boarding is to be used to protect windows and/or doors, the following should be considered as the minimum specification: Externally line with 11mm thick plywood, fixed to internal horizontal/vertical timber tie bars, 100mm x 50mm, set at not more than 400mm intervals and secured using coach bolts passing through the plywood and tie bar. The bolts must be burred over the nuts, which must be on the inside and spaced at intervals not exceeding 150mm. Where concrete blocks are used they should be 225mm thick concrete blocks with an external cement render finish, approximately 10/15mm thick, which should be painted the same colour as the surrounding brick/stonework using masonry paint.



Building services

- All utilities, other than those required for fire and security protection as described below, should be disconnected at the perimeter of the building or other such suitable location. Disconnections should be undertaken in such a way that re-connection cannot be done easily
- All water tanks, pipes and apparatus, except those that are specifically required for fire fighting purposes, should be isolated and drained down
- The integrity of any fire main, sprinkler installation, intruder alarm, automatic fire alarm and other electrical or electronic security system should be preserved, including the continuation of weekly inspection and testing arrangements, and existing maintenance contracts
- Some building utilities (such as heating) may be required to remain operational if sprinkler systems are still utilised as the internal temperature of the building must at all times be maintained at or above 4 Degrees Centigrade to avoid frost damage and potential leakage from the sprinkler system.

Fire alarm systems

It is strongly recommended that, where an automatic fire detection system is provided within a building, the system remains in operation.

It is important to remember that fire alarms, which signal solely by local sounders, will be of limited use during the period of unoccupancy. Consideration should be given to linking the alarm to an alarm-receiving centre (ARC) to gain keyholder response. It should also be checked with the local Fire & Rescue Service if they will respond to an automatic fire alarm without confirmation that a fire has started.

Closed Circuit TV (CCTV)

CCTV is considered to be a solution for security problems. While CCTV is extremely useful for providing general surveillance, it must be remembered that it can be easily overcome if the system is not to be continually monitored by either a security guard or a remote alarm-receiving centre (ARC).

Systems can be provided which incorporate external intruder alarm beams around the perimeter of any building or yard, that, when activated, start recording or send live pictures to a remote alarm-receiving centre. Where such installations are to be considered, a full environmental assessment should be undertaken to assess the possibility of false activation by wildlife.





Intruder alarm systems

Where a building is already protected by an intruder alarm, it is strongly recommended that the alarm remains operative at all times.

It is essential that the remote signalling equipment to an alarm-receiving centre (ARC) remains operative to ensure early response to any activation. As a property owner it may be necessary for the alarm contract to be transferred to you (for example, when the system was installed by a tenant who has since vacated) to ensure the system and its remote signalling remains active and reliable.

It is equally important to protect newly constructed buildings that are either waiting to be leased/sold, or that are being fitted out. Thieves who steal building fixtures and fittings may target these buildings.

Intruder alarms can additionally be utilised to assist with monitoring contractors entering and exiting the building. The majority of intruder alarm control panels incorporate event log facilities which will normally record in excess of the last 250 events of the system being set or unset.

Police Forces require that a keyholder can attend alarm-protected premises within 20 minutes of the alarm activating. Where this is not possible, the services of a key holding security guarding company can be retained.

- Consider the installation of an intruder alarm system if the premises are vulnerable or isolated, have suffered previous entries or attempted entries, or contain goods that could be attractive to thieves
- Ensure that the system is installed and maintained by an NSI (National Security Inspectorate) or SSAIB (Security Systems and Alarm Inspections Board) to gain police response
- Provide a remote signalling transmission system to a 24 hour manned alarm receiving centre to ensure police attendance in the event of the alarm being triggered. Take special care to ensure that false alarms are not generated, as the police will not respond to alarm systems which cause an unacceptable number of false calls
- External audible warning devices must be sited at least 3 metres off the ground or out of normal reach. If this cannot be achieved two external sounders must be provided
- It is essential that intruder alarm installations are designed, maintained and operated correctly. Systems have to be designed to filter out false alarms, known as "Verification". This is typically created sequentially ie more than 1 detector has to activate to generate response from the police
- On completion of the installation work, it is important that all persons required to set/unset the alarm are provided with adequate training. This will assist in reducing the possibility of false activations and reduction in Police response.



Temporary alarm systems

AXA have successfully pioneered the use of temporary alarm systems in unoccupied buildings in recent years and their use is now widespread across unoccupied buildings.

They have advantages over permanent alarms that there is no immediate large capital expenditure (systems are leased) and there are no issues in transferring contracts (ie where alarms were installed initially by tenants who have vacated). It is important that any temporary alarm selected is approved for use by AXA and incorporates remote cellular communication between the protected premises and an alarm-receiving centre.

Companies installing temporary vacant property alarms must be approved under SSAIB Code of Practice for Temporary Alarms (www.ssaib.org).

Temporary alarm systems should incorporate confirmed forms of detection, such as audible verification or sequential verification. Typically this is sequential ie more than one detector must activate.

It is unlikely that Police will respond to the activation of a temporary alarm installation, so procedures must be established to ensure that a keyholder can attend the premises on system activation. Alternatively, the services of a key holding security guarding company can be retained.

Temporary alarm systems can incorporate fire detection in addition to security protection.





Security guards

Larger buildings, or those located within areas of high crime rate such as reported in Police crime maps, may require a permanent security presence within the building.

Where security guards are used, it is important that they are carefully selected, and that the on-site guards are instructed as to the duties expected of them. Guards and companies must be approved under SIA (Security Industry Authority) as a minimum to operate in the UK. However, it is recommended that guarding contractors are also members of the NSI (National Security Inspectorate), inspected and accredited to NSI Gold Standard. Full listings of appropriate companies are available at www.nsi.org.uk/directory.

Where consideration is to be given to companies who are not members of the NSI, the following checklist can be utilised to help select a guarding contractor.

Company organisation

- Can the company supply details of its structure, principals and ultimate owners?
- Can the company supply evidence of adequate insurance to cover your needs?
- Can the company supply a satisfactory written contract, or will they agree to use a contract supplied by you?

Staff selection and vetting

- Does the company conduct 10 years retrospective vetting (or to school leaving)?

Training

- Does the company have a qualified trainer?
- Does the company keep records of the training undertaken by each employee?

Control and supervision

- Does the company operate a Control Room?
- Is a system of check calls operated to ensure that the guard on your site is being remotely supervised satisfactorily?
- Are there appropriate records kept to enable you to check the running of your site?
- Have you approved and signed a copy of the Assignment Instructions for your site?
- Is there a system of mobile supervision and management at nights and weekends?
- Are there appropriate arrangements for the notification of an incident to a senior manager?

Inspection and quality standards

Can the company certify that it complies with the code of practice for the manned security industry, BS 7499 'Static Guarding, Mobile Patrol and BS7984 for Keyholding Services'?

Can the company certify that screening of staff is conducted in accordance with BS 7858 'Security screening of personnel employed in a security environment'?

Is the company certificated to the ISO 9000 quality standard?



Employers liability (Health and Safety Risk)

Unoccupied properties need careful consideration in terms of the potential hazards that can be encountered and the following is intended as a non-exhaustive list of guidance:

- Slips, trips, and falls from wet areas caused by leaking roofs and/or spilled fluids such as oil, grease etc. This is particularly relevant when machinery has been moved.
- Holding down bolts and studs are often left protruding from floor surfaces and can be a serious trip hazard as well as a potential impalement risk. Studs should be highlighted or protected in some way.
- Many machines have sumps and pits associated with their operation and when machinery is removed little thought is given to the risk of a fall, which can be up to 3 or 4 metres.
- Old electrical equipment, particularly oil filled switchgear, often contains printed circuit boards which are cancer causing agents. If equipment is being removed a specialist contractor should remove oil first.
- In places where there has been an incidence of vandalism, switchgear is often smashed open to remove the copper and brass contacts. These have an attractive scrap value and oil is likely to have leaked out. Printed circuit boards are absorbed through the skin by touch. Do not touch any spilled or leaking fluids.
- Take care, there could be discarded hypodermic needles and other drug users' equipment as this could be contaminated with HIV or Hepatitis.
- Pigeon and rat droppings contain harmful bacteria and must be treated with caution.
- Pigeon droppings harbour a microscopic bacillus that in some cases can cause a disease called Psittacosis-ornithosis (also known as ornithosis or parrot fever). The symptoms are flu-like with the onset of pneumonia. It is also a prescribed notifiable disease under the RIDDOR 2013 regulations. The best control is to educate employees and ensure that dried bird droppings, feathers, etc are not disturbed.
- Weils Disease (Pronounced Viles Disease), otherwise known as Leptospirosis, is carried in the urine of female rats. Infection is through cuts and open wounds. The symptoms include high fever and headaches and can be fatal in severe cases. The best control is to educate employees regarding the potential risk and issue them with information cards available from the HSE.
- Legionella risk is enhanced when buildings and properties are left empty for a period of time. Although water supplies are usually turned off it is advisable to avoid turning on taps, flushing toilets, running showers etc where water has been standing for a period of time as the bacteria count will be high and may contain Legionella. Infection is through inhalation of contaminated water droplets, which travel deep into the lungs, causing pneumonia. Legionella information cards are also available from the HSE. Educate employees about the risk.
- Old premises may contain asbestos material. This can be in the form of pipe insulation or lagging, sprayed asbestos or limpit usually found as a fire protection medium on structural steelwork, and more commonly asbestos insulation and cement products. Avoid touching damaged or deteriorating pipe lagging. The owner or landlord of the premises has a duty to maintain an Asbestos Register and ensure that asbestos material does not deteriorate to the degree where it becomes a hazard.
- Beware of boards and planks lying around as these can hide hazards such as floor voids, protruding nails etc. Avoid walking on these.
- Be alert for door openings into voids, lift shafts where lifts may have been removed, access ladders and fire escape stairs that are loose, have missing sections or are not properly maintained.
- Be careful if entering basements. Some areas adjacent to rivers and canals carry a flood risk and may have sumps' pumps disconnected when power is switched off. In addition to this, noxious vapours can accumulate which carry an asphyxiation risk.



Public and occupiers liability risk (Third Party Risk)

In Health and Safety Law and Common Law, a duty of care exists to all parties – insofar as these apply to the person in charge, usually referred to as the ‘controller of the premises’. This means that a duty of care in law exists to all parties invited on to the premises for legitimate means, such as a visiting security guard who is under contract to inspect the property periodically.

Similarly, and to a lesser extent a duty of care is owed to those who trespass accidentally or deliberately. To ensure that all reasonable steps have been taken, the following provides some guidance in controlling this area:

- Make sure that you have identified all areas of potential risk by carrying out a basic risk assessment. This should be forwarded under a covering letter to any security guarding company or other contractor(s), plumbers, glaziers etc that you may be employing.
 - Ensure that contractors (including security guarding companies) carry appropriate levels of Public Liability cover. This should reflect the level of potential loss.
 - Make sure that, when employing contractors, you carry out an evaluation of their track record of completed projects and take up references before employing them.
 - Always make sure that you have a contract between yourself and any contractor. If necessary, stipulate conditions regarding conduct. This may require legal advice, there are standard forms of contract available for this purpose.
 - Contractors are to be supervised when on the premises and a responsible person be made aware of their presence by reporting their time on site via visitor logs.
- If contractors are carrying out work involving the application of heat, make sure this is done under a hot work permit with the appropriate controls (see page 16 for a sample hot work permit).
- Make sure that all relevant signs and services are still in use as a duty of care exists by the host employer to provide basic welfare services such as hot water, toilet facilities, workplace heating etc.
 - In vacant properties, relevant signs with pictograms are just as important. Fragile roof signs and warning notices need to be fixed in prominent locations and access points around the building(s).
 - Ensure that local emergency services are aware that the premises are unoccupied. This is particularly important for the fire brigade.
 - Liaise with local schools and the community police officer to give advice about unoccupied properties and the potential risks that they pose to school children.
 - Always make sure entrances and exits are secure and that no materials are left lying around. In particular, make sure that contractors remove any plant, tools or equipment that they may be using at the end of each shift. If this is not possible, make sure that they understand it is their responsibility to ensure the security of these items.
 - One of the most significant aspects of an empty property is any potential for pollution risk. Part of your risk assessment must take account of stored chemicals, oils, or effluents and the potential for these to contaminate or pollute the environment. All such substances must be removed and disposed of carefully in line with the legal requirements.



Weekly register of unoccupied buildings

Building inspections

Building address

.....

Emergency contact

Name

Phone Mobile

Email

Intruder alarm with remote link? **Yes / No**

Fire alarm with remote link? **Yes / No**

Date of visit

Person undertaking visit

Arrival time Departure time

Building

Intruder alarm with remote link? **Yes / No**

Comment

.....

Action required

Work completion

Date / /

Signed



Electrical supply

Disconnected? **Yes / No**

If no, is it switched off at mains on departure? **Yes / No**

Comments

.....

Water supply plumbing installation disconnected and drained? **Yes / No**

Comments

.....

Heating disconnected? **Yes / No**

If No, is it operated on

Time switch? **Yes / No**

Frost stat? **Yes / No**

Comments

.....

Site perimeter

Perimeter fence and gates secure? **Yes / No / Not applicable**

Perimeter clear of combustible materials (at least 10 meters)? **Yes / No**

Comments

.....

Water supply plumbing installation disconnected and drained? **Yes / No**

If No, date combustibles removed / /

Signed



Internal building

Are there combustible materials within building? **Yes / No**

Comments

If Yes, date combustibles removed / /

Signed

Weather protection

Is the building wind and water tight? **Yes / No**

If No, action required

Date / /

Signed

Vandalism

Is there evidence of vandalism: External? **Yes / No**

Internal? **Yes / No**

If No, action required

Date / /

Signed

Copy of this register to be retained for not less than 12 months



Hot work permit

Permit no:

Location:

Description of work (inc exact location within the site):

.....

Date: Start time: Finish time:

(Note – hot work must cease **1 hour** before the end of the working day)

Signature of person issuing permit

Issuing company:

Signed:

Block capitals:

Date:

Position:

Signature of person receiving permit

Issued to (company and individual name):

I confirm that I understand the scope of the work permitted. The location has been examined and the precautions listed on page 2 of this permit have been fully complied with.

I have carried out a risk assessment and consider that there is no reasonable practical alternative to doing this job using hot work due to

.....

Signed:

Block capitals:

Date:

Position:

Time work started: Time work finished & cleared up:



Following completion of works

Time of final check (1 hour after work completed):

The work area and all adjacent areas to which sparks and heat might have spread (such as floors below and above and areas on other side of walls) have been inspected and found to be free of smouldering materials and flames: **Yes / No**

All hot waste materials have been removed: **Yes / No**

All equipment, including gas cylinders, has been removed to a safe area: **Yes / No**

Signed:

Block capitals:

Date:

Position:

Sign off by issuer of permit

The hot work has been completed.

Any fire protection systems isolated for the works have been fully reinstated.

A final check has been undertaken 1 hour after works finished.

Signed:

Block capitals:

Date:

Position:



Hot work permit - Precautions

The person carrying out this check should sign and date at the bottom of the page to confirm all suitable precautions have been taken.

Tick as appropriate those precautions which have been taken. Those, which are not relevant, should be marked with a cross.

Wherever practicable the use of hot work should be avoided and a safer way employed. If you cannot comply with the following points, do not go ahead with the hot work.

Fire protection

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Where sprinklers are installed, they are operative | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Where fire detection is installed it is operative (only the zone where the work is carried out will be isolated) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A person, not directly involved with the work will provide a continuous fire watch during the period of hot work and for at least one hour after it has ceased, in the work area and those adjoining areas where sparks and heat may spread | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At least two appropriate fire extinguishers are immediately available | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The person undertaking the work and providing the fire watch are trained in their use | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel involved with the work are familiar with the means of escape and method of raising the alarm/calling the fire brigade | <input type="checkbox"/> |

NB – No gas cylinders to be left in the building overnight.

Precautions (within 10 meters of the work)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Combustible materials have been cleared | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Where combustible materials cannot be removed, protection has been provided by non-combustible or purpose-made blankets, drapes or screens | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Flammable liquids have been removed from the area | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Floors have been swept clean | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Combustible floors covered with overlapping sheets or non-combustible materials are wetted and liberally covered with sand | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All openings and gaps are adequately covered | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Protection (non-combustible) has been provided for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Walls, partitions & ceilings of combustible construction or surfaces finish; andAll holes & other openings in walls, partitions & ceilings which sparks could pass | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Where work is being carried out on building panels, an assessment has been made of insulating or other material behind or forming the core of the panel | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Combustible materials have been moved away from the far side of walls or partitions where heat could conduct | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Enclosed equipment (tanks, containers, dust collectors etc) have been emptied and tested, or is known to be free of flammable concentrations or vapour or dust | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Equipment

- Equipment for hot work has been checked and found to be in good repair
- Gas cylinders have been properly secured in a vertical position & fitted with regulator & flashback arrestor
- All hazardous materials and equipment removed from the hot works location as soon as works completed

Bitumen boilers, lead heaters, etc

- Gas cylinders are sited at least three metres from the burner
- If sited on a roof, heat-insulating base provided
- Any lit tar boilers will not be left unattended
- Boilers & heaters must only be used with a metal containment tray in place
- Boilers to be cooled one hour before the end of the working day

Signed:

Block capitals:

Date:

Position:



AXA Insurance

Practical guide to unoccupied buildings