

HIDDEN THREATS

THE 21 CRITICAL STEPS
YOU MUST TAKE TO
PROTECT YOUR VACANT
PROPERTY.

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The 21 Critical Steps You Must Take to Protect Your Vacant Property

Before you lock the front door of your investment house, consider the risks and other issues properties are faced with when left vacant for an extended period of time.

When the situation arises when a home or investment property is vacant for an extended period, it is important to protect it from the potential of damage, burglary, or vandalism. A house left unoccupied for 30 consecutive days or more is how most insurance companies define as vacant. Let's look at the many risks and issues that a vacant house may experience while left alone.

What are the Hidden Threats that can leave your property vulnerable during vacancy? Lets take a look:

- 🏠 Gas leaks
- 🏠 Frozen taps and pipes
- 🏠 Clogged drainage systems
- 🏠 Toxic black mould
- 🏠 Heat loss
- 🏠 Broken, or cracked windows
- 🏠 Pests, rodents, and small animals
- 🏠 Severe weather occurrences, and natural disasters



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The 21 Steps to take before leaving a property alone for 30 days or longer:

☐ 1. The Fireplace:

If you have a gas fireplace, make sure to turn the gas off when it won't be used for an extended period of time. It is recommended that you maintain the unit by keeping it clean of dirt and dust build up to avoid clogging and inefficient burning. A worn-out gasket can lead to the leaking of poisonous carbon monoxide into the home.

Brick fireplaces that are not in use should be sealed off to reduce drafts and block out unwanted pests in the chimney. A fitted chimney balloon is an effective way to create a seal.

☐ 2. The Furnace:

Turn off the gas furnace. When the pilot light is on it generates heat, and fuel is being used. When your house is left for an extended period that might include warm months, when there is no need for additional heat.

During the winter months, it may be necessary to keep it running to make sure the home remains at a comfortable temperature to make sure plumbing does not freeze during cold temperatures. It is important to make sure your furnace filter is kept clean by either replacing them or rinsing off the washable filters.



☐ 3. Service Dates - Furnace:

Check last service date of furnace. To ensure the efficiency of the furnace, the system must undergo regular maintenance checks; normally twice yearly, at the beginning of spring and at the beginning of autumn. It is important to check the last service date to make sure the that its maintenance is on schedule.

☐ 4. Service Dates - Air Conditioner:

Check service date of A/C system. Similar reasons as with the furnace, in addition the importance of routinely replacing or cleaning its filters every month or two during the cooling season and annually for overall maintenance. Failure to change the filter could lead to breathing and respiratory illnesses for the residents of the home.

Fire Prevention:

☐ 5. Alarm Systems:

Check smoke, carbon monoxide and security alarms and replace batteries. Not only is the replacement of batteries and the testing of units important to do on a regular basis (usually twice per year), also the buildup of dust can clog a smoke alarm and cause false nuisance alarms, which is not good if the property is sitting vacant for an extended period of time. Make sure to carefully vacuum the outside of the unit using a soft bristle brush vacuum attachment at least once every six months. Also consider the age of the units because smoke alarms do wear out, if your alarms are more than 10 years old it is time for a replacement. Dates are indicated on the unit itself. When unsure, replace them just in case.

☐ 6. Electrical plugs and chords:

Check electrical cords, plugs, and outlets for all indoor and outdoor seasonal lights to ensure fire safety: if worn, or if plugs or cords feel warm to the touch unplug them immediately. When leaving for an extended period of time, unplug all extension cords completely.



☐ 7. Fire Extinguishers:

Check gauge on all fire extinguishers recharge or replace if necessary. You would be surprised to know that an unused fire extinguisher becomes useless after a period of time. Every model is different and therefore each lifespan is different, and it is critical that you check the gauges on all fire extinguishers regularly and recharge or replace if necessary. When in doubt, replace.

☐ 8. Electrical Panels:

Inspect electrical service lines for secure attachments where they enter the house and make sure there is no water leakage into the house along the electrical conduit. Check furnace air filters, and ventilation systems such as heat recovery ventilator.

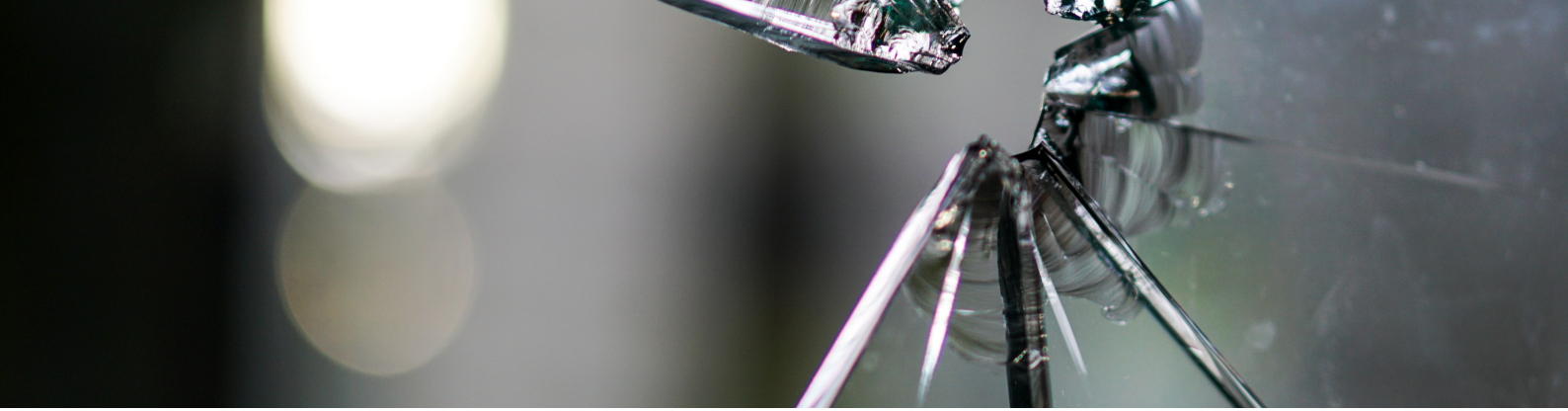
☐ 9. Chimneys:

Check chimneys connected to any wood burning appliance or fireplace and inspect them for end of season problems. Not only for soot and debris build up, check to make sure it is free of small rodents or animals dead or alive.

☐ 10. Basements:

Check basement pipes for condensation or dripping. Examine walls and floors for cracks and moisture. Warped floorboards, lifting and peeling wallpaper, bubbling paint, mould, and wood decay are all the result of excess moisture. These are sources of potential health risks and safety issues for the homes residents.





Safety and Security:

☐ 11. Windows:

Ensure windows and skylights close tightly and are properly locked and free of cracks or damage.

☐ 12. Doors:

If there is a door between the house and the garage, check the adjustment of the self-closing device to ensure it closes the door completely.

☐ 13. Railings, Steps, and Floors:

Check safety hazards of all guardrails and handrails that might be loose. Check for lifting or bulking carpet or flooring.

Plumbing:

☐ 14. Fixtures

Due to vacancy, the house will have plumbing fixtures that are not being used frequently, such as a laundry tub or spare bathroom sink, tub or shower stall, etc. Run some water briefly to keep water in the trap.

☐ 15. Valves

Test plumbing shut-off valves to ensure they are working and to prevent them from seizing

☐ 16. Radiators

If you have an older home with radiators, make sure to bleed air from hot water radiators



Safety and Security:

☐ **17. Exterior:**

Check for any holes in exterior cladding that could be an entry point for small pests such as mice, rats, squirrels, and skunks. Check chimneys for obstructions such as nests.

Clear all drainage ditches and culvers of debris

Cover outside of air conditioning units

☐ **18. Doors & Locks:**

Ensure all doors to the outside shut tightly and check other doors for ease of use. Secure all latches and locks on garage doors, gates, and sheds.

☐ **19. Walkways & Steps:**

Check steps, handrails, and driveway for safety hazards. To prevent slip, trip, and falls address all potential hazards that may exist such as: raised or cracked walkways, and slanted surfaces that run downhill toward the house may become a slippery ice rink in the winter.

☐ **20. Moisture:**

Monitor the house for excessive moisture levels. For example, condensation on the windows, can cause significant damage over time and pose serious health problems. Ensure the room has proper ventilation, and that there is proper airflow during the winter and summer months.

☐ **21. Water Traps & Downspouts**

If the house is 30 years or older, check the basement floor drain to ensure that trap contains water. Refill with water if necessary. To avoid water from backing up and flooding into the basement when it rains, it is critically important to clear debris from floor drain traps. Also, consider disconnecting downspouts from the drains, and discharging them out onto the lawn, six feet away from the house.



Thank You!

We hope you found this checklist helpful for protecting your property as it sits vacant for an extended period of time. If you're looking for more helpful resources like this one, check out the blog on our website.

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