

inspection of
vacant property
– a guide



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Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	3
1. Scope	3
2. Definitions	3
2.1. Company	3
2.2. Vacant Property	3
2.3. Vacant Property protection equipment	3
3. Customer charter	4
3.1. Health and Safety	4
3.1.1. General	4
3.1.2. Risk assessment	4
3.1.3. Manual handling	4
3.1.4. Safety equipment and personal protective equipment	4
3.1.5. Tools	4
3.1.6. Vermin infestations	4
3.1.7. Discharged syringes / excreta / hazardous material	5
3.2. ISO 9001:2000 registration	5
3.3. Insurance	5
3.4. Training	5
3.5. Vetting of staff	5
3.6. Company identity	6
3.6.1. Clothing	6
3.6.2. Identity cards	6
4. Customer liability	6
5. Property inspection	6
5.1. General Requirements:	6
5.2. Site checks:	7
5.2.1. Equipment checks:	7
5.2.2. Property checks:	7
5.3. Reports	7
6. Records & confidentiality	8
7. Bibliography	8
7.1. Regulations and Standards	8
7.2. Other Documents	8

Introduction

At any one time there are a considerable number of commercial vacant properties throughout the country. Without adequate protection these properties can be subject to misuse and either deliberate or unintentional damage. The provision of good physical protection, alarm systems and other such security solutions can help minimise and often prevent misuse and damage to these properties. This service only works with the back up of weekly property checks which is essential in the commercial sector to ensure that the required security is still in place, there has been no damage to the property and there are not any new items that could potentially cause damage to the property. Such inspections are stipulated in most insurance policies in the event of a commercial property becoming vacant.

This guide, which has been developed by members of the Physical Security Equipment Section of the British Security Industry Association in consultation with end users, represents a standard of good practice for the inspection of commercial vacant properties. End-users and insurance companies have welcomed the code and many of their proposals have been incorporated.

The guide gives best practice and recommended criteria for property checks on commercial void properties.

1. Scope

This guide covers property inspection of vacant properties.

The guide gives recommendations for the property inspection and maintenance required to keep the integrity of the property of commercial vacant properties.

Compliance with the recommendations in this guide does not imply compliance with statutory and legal requirements, nor does it necessarily satisfy all the requirements that might be specified by specific insurance companies or individual customers.

2. Definitions

2.1. Company

An organisation supplying, installing, maintaining and removing protective systems.

2.2. Vacant Property

Property that is empty and may require securing to minimise the possibility of arson, theft, vandalism or misuse.

2.3. Vacant Property protection equipment

Equipment and fittings used to secure a vacant property.

3. Customer charter

3.1. Health and Safety

3.1.1. General

Companies should have a written health and safety policy, which complies with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (supplemented by the Management of Health & Safety Regulations of 1999).

Companies should also document health and safety policy/procedures directly relating to the vacant property protection business and should be able to demonstrate that monitoring of compliance is regularly undertaken.

This should include:

3.1.2. Risk assessment

Companies should have carried out a full assessment of their obligations as a contractor in the vacant property marketplace and should have provided, or agreed, a written description of the work to be undertaken, together with associated terms and conditions.

Each employee of a company should receive appropriate training to enable them to carry out specific risk assessments at site locations as may be deemed necessary and commensurate with good working practice.

3.1.3. Manual handling

Companies should give employees full written guidance and training into aspects of the Manual Handling Operation Regulations and should provide a method statement to monitor compliance.

3.1.4. Safety equipment and personal protective equipment

Operatives should be provided with, and should wear when appropriate, the following protective BS EN 5426 approved equipment when inspecting properties.

- a. Sturdy boots / shoes with reinforced toes
- b. Hard hat / bumper cap
- c. High visibility jacket
- d. Other equipment depending on risk assessment

Companies' representatives should be given the appropriate information and training concerning the health and safety risks that such equipment should avoid or limit.

Your attention is drawn to the Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 2002 (S.I. 2002 No 1144).

3.1.5. Tools

Mains-powered electrical equipment should not be used on any customer site unless by specific agreement with the customer. Suitable rechargeable battery hand-lamps and sundry equipment should be used.

3.1.6. Vermin infestations

The presence of rats, mice, cockroaches, fleas and other vermin infestation, or the remains of such vermin or animal excreta in any work place, should be reported immediately to a manager of the company. Employees should conduct an assessment of health and safety risks and withdraw from the area concerned if deemed necessary and no work may commence or continue until suitable arrangements have been made for the control of the infestation.

3.1.7. Discharged syringes/excreta/hazardous material

Staff who have not received “sharps training” or do not have appropriate handling kits should not handle or remove “sharps”. This includes objects contaminated with body fluids, such as discarded syringes, needles, broken glass and/or other items that might penetrate the skin or be hazardous to health. Any such material should be reported immediately to a manager of the company. Employees should conduct a Risk Assessment and withdraw from the area concerned if deemed necessary and no work may commence or continue until suitable arrangements have been made for the minimisation of the effect.

3.2. ISO 9001:2000 registration

BSIA members should hold a valid Certificate of Accreditation under ISO 9001:2000, issued by a Certification Body accredited by UKAS for operations including the inspection of vacant properties.

3.3. Insurance

Each should carry at least:

- a. Employers liability cover for up to £10,000,000 per event
- b. Third party indemnity cover for up to £5,000,000 per event
- c. Third party indemnity motor vehicle cover

3.4. Training

On joining a company, all employees should be given local induction training, which should include:

- a. An understanding of the vacant property protective business
- b. Health and safety requirements (first aid)
- c. The available and permitted security solutions
- d. Risk assessment
- e. QA awareness
- f. Customer care

Training records and future training plans should be maintained for all members of staff. Refresher training for existing members of staff should be considered.

3.5. Vetting of staff

All staff that have access to protected properties should be vetted in accordance with BS 7858, with a screening period of at least 5 years, excepting that the condition for commencement of provisional employment requiring 5 years of satisfactory screening need not be applied.

3.6. Company identity

3.6.1. Identity cards

All employees should be issued with, and instructed to carry at all times whilst on duty, a photographic card confirming their position with the company. The company should ensure the periodic renewal of identity cards for

each employee. Each identity card should include the following information:

- a. Company name, address and telephone number(s)
- b. Employee's name and photograph
- c. Date of issue
- d. Date of expiry

There should be formal arrangements for the withdrawal or cancellation of the identity card from an employee when leaving the company's employment.

Note: See BS 7858 British standard Code of Practice for security screening of personnel employed in a security environment.

4. Customer liability

Companies should ensure that customers receive terms and conditions, which clearly state:

- a. The frequency of visits, which should be no less than once every 7 days
- b. The frequency that a qualified surveyor inspects the property for an inspection with emphasis on the structure and safety of the actual building, this should be no less than once every 3 months.
- c. Any special requirements
- d. Actions to be taken in the event of issues being found as a result of an inspection.
- e. The customer should grant reasonable access for the company to inspect and check the equipment.
- f. The client should be advised to seek specific guidance from their insurer and to submit the written proposals to the insurer for prior approval.

5. Property inspection

5.1. General Requirements:

- a. The company should agree a periodic programme of inspection with the customer (see 4a and 4b).
- b. Scheduled inspections should be recorded and provided as a method of confirmation that security system integrity is maintained.
- c. The company's representative should check that there are no personal effects or belongings on site. Where there are, a list should be provided to the company's representative who should confirm by site inspection that the list is correct.
- d. When applicable, appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that the client's premises are not left in a hazardous condition.
- e. The company's representatives should be satisfied that it meets the criteria of the customer.
- f. An H&S risk assessment should be conducted for the safety of the inspector and to give information back to the customer for their use.

5.2. Site checks:

5.2.1. Equipment checks:

- a. Equipment should be free of all graffiti
- b. Door locking mechanisms should be working correctly and easy, property doors should be fitted with sufficient high security locks.
- c. Regular checks should be carried out to identify equipment which has been tampered with.
- d. Breaches or unauthorised entries, giving details of apparent method of entry and damage caused.
- e. Heating systems (by agreement with customers).
- f. Alarm systems should be working (if applicable). The availability of mains electricity to mains powered alarm systems should be checked.

5.2.2. Property checks:

- a. Site perimeter; check suitability of perimeter fencing, check the security of gates, if any squatters or travellers are on site and any waste material is on site
- b. External building; check that the building is secure, free from breach or attempted breach and for any vandalism
- c. Internal building; check for combustible materials, rubbish, and vandalism; check that internal doors, fixtures, fittings and chattel assets, are present and intact.
- d. Services; check gas, electric and water have been disconnected or isolated (where applicable); obtain gas / electric meter reading where applicable.
- e. Structure; check the building is structurally sound, that it is safe to walk around on all floors, check that no parts of the building are due to collapse etc, (refer to 4.b).

5.3. Reports

The inspections are to be recorded on a suitable report that is available to the customer within 24h of the inspection. This should record the above checks, the defects found and the risks to the customer's property or organisation. It should also record required actions and a reference as to whether those actions are recommended or mandatory to satisfy the organisation's insurance policy.

Note: *the relationship between the inspecting organisation and owner of the property is individual to their contract. At no point can the inspecting organisation be held responsible if the owning organisation does not action the mandatory or recommended actions. Neither can the inspecting organisation be responsible for failure of the owning organisation to inform them of requirements of the owner's insurance.*

A monthly or ongoing management check to ensure the inspections are being completed efficiently and the actions are being recorded correctly is to take place.

Actions: Provision is to be provided to resolve any actions that are required to comply with the insurance policy within the given timescales.

6. Records & confidentiality

The maintenance of confidentiality and secure storage of data is of paramount importance. Steps should be taken to ensure the safe custody of all keys, equipment relating to installations, and personnel records.

Employees should be required to enter into an undertaking to keep confidential any information relating to the company's business and their customers' businesses as part of their employment contract.

7. Property inspection

7.1. Regulations and standards

- Management of Health & Safety Regulations of 1999
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Construction (Working Places) Regulation 1996
- Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 2002
- The manual handling operations regulations 1992
- Safety Equipment BS EN 5426:1993
- Security Screening of Personnel BS 7858:2006

7.2 Other documents

- The RISC Authority (formerly The Insurers' Fire Research Strategy Scheme ('InFiReS') and the Insurers' Property Crime Research Group ('IPCRes')) publications:
 - Code of Practice for the protection of empty buildings: fire safety and security
 - Guidance for the selection and use of electronic security systems in empty buildings