



Idle or Vacant Facilities

Risk Control

Overview

Vacant and idle facilities present a higher level of exposure for fire, theft and vandalism, water damage and many other perils. Here are some tips to protect your business and reduce the risk before, during and after idle periods.

Before: Conduct a Risk Assessment and Prepare for Shutdown

Prior to idling a facility, conduct a risk assessment to identify potential vulnerabilities and the measures needed to protect the structure for the duration of the vacancy or idle period. Consider the following questions:

How will facilities be inspected and maintained during the vacancy period?

- Who will be responsible, and what will be included in the inspection process? How will they be tracked and monitored, and how will concerns or problems be addressed?
- Have you informed your local post office and other suppliers (e.g. landline telephone) to divert services to another group site?
- Is ongoing third-party maintenance required for the building and its systems during the idle period?
- Do you have the capability to monitor environmental conditions and equipment remotely using IoT (Internet of Things) sensors or other remote monitoring technologies?
- Will security staff be present and able to conduct inspections? Will their hours need to be extended on account of the vacancy? Will their response procedures need updating?
- Are all security protection features fit for duty, including fencing, sealed letterbox, lighting, Intruder Alarm and CCTV (if fitted / operational)?
- If video surveillance is in place, can you access and view live and recorded content remotely?
- Are there combustible materials around your site that should be moved inside or away from the structure to reduce the risk of arson or vandalism?

- How will the building be physically secured (locks, alarm systems, windows, etc.)?
- What additional security exposures may exist when facilities are vacant or idle?
- Has a plan been put in place for prevention of arson? (planning of site security and fire prevention methods)
- Have there been any recent local incidents (e.g. fly-tipping, travellers or raves) since the previous audit in nearby vacant / unoccupied premises?

What utilities are essential to maintain within the building, and which can be safely shut down to reduce risk?

- Are any special procedures required for idling key machinery and equipment? How will you monitor utility disruptions, such as power loss? Are notification and response procedures/call trees in place for temperature sensitive equipment and contents?
- Have key technology assets, documents and supplies necessary to maintain business operations been removed to a secure location?
- How will fire protection and detection systems be inspected, tested and maintained?
- Will domestic water systems need to be shut off and drained to prevent freezing or reduce the overall risk of undetected water damage?

During: Site Inspections

Periodic inspections of the premises should be conducted regularly – ideally at least once a week. If security personnel remain at the site, they may be able to perform site inspections or supplement normal inspections with additional checks on key areas. IoT technology such as temperature, humidity, moisture, valve position and other similar sensors can be leveraged as part of the inspection process when set up for remote monitoring. However, these systems may not be comprehensive and should not be relied upon solely for monitoring facilities during idle or vacant periods.

What should an effective site inspection include?

- Conduct a complete tour of the exterior of the building to identify signs of entry or vandalism, clogged or blocked drains, pest control equipment and similar maintenance needs. If it appears that unlawful entry has been made, contact law enforcement prior to entering the building.
- Check all areas of the interior and pay particular attention to environmental conditions in the building. Ensure all HVAC systems are in good working order and thermostats are operable. Maintain temperatures above 4 °C (preferably above 10 °C) to ensure integrity of any active plumbing systems and sprinkler protection.
- Is there any accumulation of combustible materials inside or outside of the vacant property?
- Undetected water damage is a significant concern in vacant and idle buildings. Look for leaks or signs of water intrusion, such as stained ceiling tiles or other interior surfaces. If domestic water or other utilities have been turned off, check shutoff valves to ensure no issues such as leaks have developed. Drain domestic plumbing systems and consider the addition of food grade antifreeze to all plumbing fixtures (sinks, toilets, etc.) to avoid freeze-up of drain traps if cold weather is anticipated.
- Are all fire prevention features fit for duty, including sprinkler installations, fire alarm and fire extinguishers, if fitted and operational?
- If the roof is accessible, check for clogged roof drains, rooftop structure damage from recent storms, and evidence of unauthorised access via roof hatches, skylights or stairwell doors.

After: Occupying the Building/Restarting Systems and Equipment

When the time comes to reoccupy the facility, take the following steps to ensure a smooth transition back to full operation:

If domestic plumbing systems have been shut off or drained, restore systems by slowly opening valves to reduce the risk of water hammer. If possible, restore systems section by section to allow for a visual inspection of these areas first to ensure there are no signs of leakage or other problems.

Ensure fire protection systems are in good working order and operating normally. This is a good time to schedule periodic maintenance and inspection by a qualified contractor to ensure no issues have developed. Inspection, testing and maintenance should be in accordance with EN12845 and other applicable requirements.

Have a licensed contractor or qualified employees inspect HVAC systems to ensure they are working as intended and necessary maintenance is completed.

If electrical systems or portions of the electrical distribution were disconnected, these should be restored gradually (with no/minimal load) to reduce the risk of transient voltage (surge) that can damage equipment and electrical components.

If production equipment was idled, follow manufacturer instruction for restoring the equipment to normal operating conditions.