



Best Practice Guidelines for Managing Vacant Commercial Properties During COVID-19

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Across EMEA we are now approaching 30 days since companies started closing their premises for the current lockdown period. To secure the building, some insurers stipulate remedial activities should be in place within 14 days, but many state 28-30 days as a maximum period for the buildings to be left empty.

Colliers International can help and advise on vacant property management and maintenance during this period. Our teams are available to assist at any time.

A summary of best practice actions that should be carried out are listed below, which are generally in line with most insurers' requirements:



SITE SECURITY

check perimeter fences and gates are in good state of repair and operational



EXTERNAL LIGHTING

check lighting and any associated movement sensors are operational



BUILDING SECURITY

check window and door locks plus any security shutters are operational. The use of external key safes should not be used



ACCESS CONTROL

check to ensure systems are operational and maintained



CCTV

check that CCTV is operational and maintained including recording and any remote monitoring



INTRUDER ALARM

expect slower Police response times. Ensure that alarm systems are operational and maintained including offsite remote monitoring. Confirm keyholder availability with alarm company



AUTOMATIC SPRINKLER

protection should remain fully operational and maintained. Weekly testing should continue with guidance sought as to whether this can be supported whilst adhering to social distancing



AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARM

check to ensure the system is fully operational and maintained including offsite remote monitoring



FIRE DOORS

ensure all internal fire doors and shutters are closed



LETTERBOXES

should be sealed and arrange mail redirection



LARGE CAR PARKS

where vulnerable to incursion and potential fly-tipping, additional security measures should be considered including provision of 4.5 ton concrete blocks



INSPECTIONS

where possible arrangements should be made for a weekly internal and external site inspection with guidance sought as to whether this can be supported whilst adhering to social distancing



WASTE

internal and external waste to be removed from site and external storage located a minimum of 10m from the building



UTILITIES

electrical, water, heating – shutdown and isolate / drain any non-essential utility services that are not required for operational reasons, maintaining minimum temperatures to prevent freezing or power circuits for protection



EQUIPMENT SAFEGUARDING

ensure all non-operational plant and machinery is properly stored and secured



HOT WORK

non-essential hot work activity should cease unless a continuous fire watch can be maintained and at least for one hour after the work ceases



PEST CONTROL

continue all routine pest control visits and monitor food & waste storage areas for any signs of increased activity



MAINTENANCE

the ongoing planned preventative maintenance regimes should continue especially for critical plant and machinery, utilities and protection equipment. Adjustment to maintenance or servicing may be appropriate (i.e. increased time between kitchen extract duct cleaning due to less use)

Considerations to keep vacant properties in excellent condition

While the buildings are unused, consideration should be given to keeping the building in the best condition to be able to re-open to staff as soon as the lockdown is lifted.



HVAC MAINTENANCE

In order to bring the building back up to full operation with the minimum of cost and effort, controls and systems may be reduced to a minimum operation or switched off. As the ambient external temperatures are increasing, heating should be isolated or reduced with minimal impact and cooling systems can be set to higher internal temperatures to minimise energy usage while the buildings are unoccupied. This will help reduce energy usage whilst ensuring the sites can easily be brought back into full operation.



STATUTORY COMPLIANCE

It will be for the Landlord or Occupier (dependant on lease obligations) to ensure that all of the systems and services remain in a safe and compliant state in order that they can be used when the building is re-opened. If the relevant service providers are unavailable to carry out this testing, it may be worth discussing this with your insurers to see if they will accept the risk and provide cover for the service to be used while it is out of compliance. Alternatively, you could evaluate using a different contractor to perform the maintenance / testing until the lockdown is lifted.



LEGIONELLA RISK

In an effort to manage the risk of Legionella build up in stagnant or little used water supplies in the buildings, regular flushing and turnover of the stored water should be actioned. The Water Risk Assessment for the property, along with the Water Log Book, should be consulted to give advice to the key parts of the systems that need to be turned over and your Water Risk Assessor should be consulted for a suitable programme to be carried out. It may be as simple as a weekly flush of all toilets and leave each tap to run for two minutes. A micro-biological sample can be taken a couple of days before reopening the site to ensure that the bacterial levels within the pipework are within an acceptable level. All spray taps and showers should be chlorinated as advised in the buildings planned maintenance during this time.



CLEANING

If the building is not being cleaned during the period, a deep clean should be carried out with attention being given to common touch points to ensure they have been disinfected sufficiently. By touch points we mean, door handles, push plates, taps, flush handles, i.e. common items that will be used by everyone during the course of a working day. Once the site is re-occupied, the cleaning may have to be increased to ensure that these touch points are revisited on a more regular basis.