

UNSECURED OR VACANT BUILDINGS

For various reasons, a building may become vacant, abandoned or unsecured for a period.

Vacant buildings face several of risks during the time they are unoccupied. These risks are, but not limited to:

- fire (accidental or intentional)
- vandalism and theft
- bad weather
- vermin
- squatters, trespassers

An unsecured building is easy to gain entry as trespassers (i.e. vandal, arsonist, squatter, etc.) can enter the building undetected. An unsecured building is an easy target for an arsonist and their actions not only damage the building in which they have set fire to, but also jeopardizes surrounding buildings and the lives of others that may be residing or working in nearby buildings.

Vacant buildings are also attractive to vandals for theft or, in some cases, for temporary housing. If someone is living in the building, they may have illegal makeshift heating and cooking process that are potential sources of fire.

Just as weather can affect an occupied building, bad weather can also affect a vacant building. One of the main concerns is that owners shut off some or all of the utilities to the building to save money. If a building has no heat during cold conditions, pipes/sprinkler system may freeze and rupture and then cause flooding when a thaw happens.

Regardless of the type of occupancy or the timeframe for which the building is vacant, the National Fire Code – 2023 Alberta Edition (NFC(AE)) has a subsection that addresses vacant buildings. The intent is to keep unwanted entry into the vacant building.



SAFETY TIPS

UNSECURED OR VACANT BUILDINGS

2.4.6. Vacant Buildings

2.4.6.1. Security

1) Vacant buildings shall be secured against unauthorized entry. (See Note A-2.4.6.1.(1).)

A-2.4.6.1.(1) Vacant buildings frequently become the target of vandalism and arson. They should be locked, and accessible windows and doors should be barricaded to prevent unauthorized entry. However, fire department access to the interior of the building in the event of a fire should not be made unduly difficult. Additionally, if a life safety system is currently in operation, the system shall be maintained according to the NFC(AE) to limit the probability that a fire will occur and spread beyond the building of origin and extend to other buildings.

6.1.1.2. Maintenance

1) Fire protection installations shall be maintained in operating condition. (See Note A-6.1.12.(1).)

A-6.1.1.2.(1) Both the NBC(AE) and the NFC(AE) assume that all fire protection systems in a building, whether required by Code or voluntarily installed, will be designed in conformance with good fire protection engineering practice and will meet the appropriate installation requirements in relevant standards. Such good design is necessary to ensure that the level of safety established by the Code requirements is not reduced by a voluntary installation. Thus, a voluntarily installed system should be maintained in operating condition, at least to the extent that it was originally intended to function, in conformance with the applicable installation standards.

Note: The authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) shall be consulted prior to any building, building services or life safety system being locked out, disconnected, or abandoned.

Contact

Please contact your local fire department for any questions regarding this Safety Tip.

