

The Care and Keeping of Vacant Properties

Windsor Fire Marshal's Office
Winter 2009

Why we care

"Fires in improperly secured vacant or abandoned buildings are a constant threat to firefighters, citizens and private property alike. We believe that these problems are manageable once communities recognize the urgency of the problem and act.

We are committed to making the facts and solutions known to government officials and private citizens alike so that a solution is found and pursued."

GERARD NAYLIS, PRESIDENT
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ARSON
INVESTIGATORS

"In 2003-2006, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 31,000 structure fires in vacant buildings per year. These fires resulted in an average of 50 civilian deaths, 141 civilian injuries, and \$642 million in direct property damage per year.

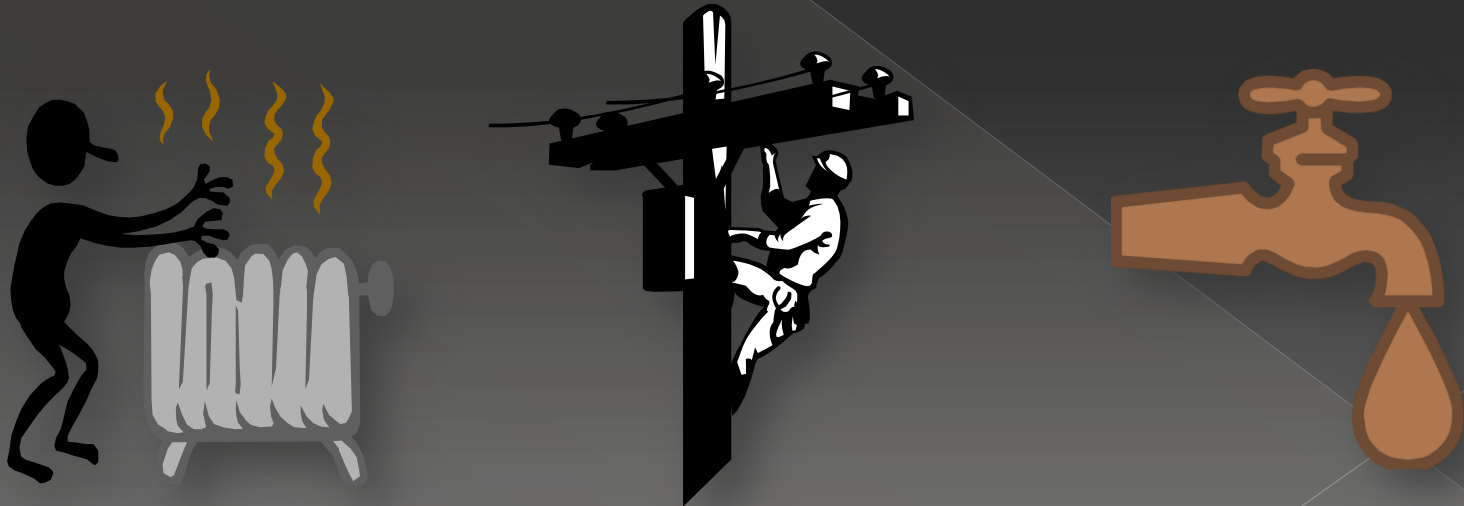
Fires in vacant buildings pose a threat to the neighborhood. Flame damage spread beyond the structure in 9% of the fires in secured vacant properties and 12% of unsecured properties, compared to only 3% of structure fires overall."

Marty Aherns. *Vacant Building Fires*, Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association, 2009, p.iii.

**Here are a few helpful tips to
protect your investment**



- Keep the utilities on, if possible. Extreme temperature changes can cause walls and woodwork to warp as well as freeze the plumbing.





- Wrap those Pipes. Make sure to wrap all exposed piping and water sources, both inside and out, with insulation. This is especially important if you turn off the utilities to the building. Don't forget items that contain standing water, use antifreeze to keep toilets, dishwashers, and other appliances from freezing. If the appliance may come in contact with drinking water be sure to use non-toxic anti-freeze.

- Have someone come in and inspect your roof for leaks or damage that could worsen in winter weather. Also have someone inspect the rest of your building for problems that may worsen during the time that a building is vacant.



- You can ask specialist about how to winterize your vacant building to be sure that you have covered everything.



- Secure all doors and windows to prevent unlawful entry into your building. This can include locking all openings and boarding up windows if appropriate.



- If your building has a sprinkler system, leave it in service if possible. Vacant buildings are particularly prone to arson and vandalism, and since no one is there to monitor the building a small fire could quickly involve the entire building if a sprinkler system were to be shut down.

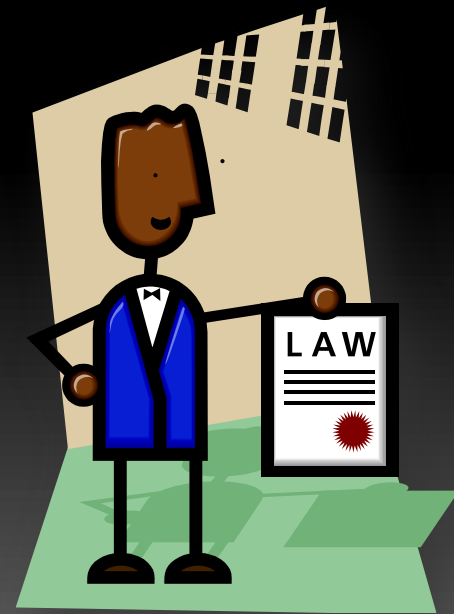


- Accumulations of all combustible materials, rubbish, or hazardous materials need to be removed. Seasonally occupied buildings and buildings undergoing renovation or construction are the only exceptions.



Something to keep in mind

The Connecticut State Fire Safety Code now includes requirements for vacant buildings



10.14 – Vacant Buildings and Premises

- **10.14.1 General.** Temporarily unoccupied buildings, structures, premises or portions thereof, including tenant spaces, shall be safeguarded and maintained in accordance with section 10.14.
 - > **10.14.1.1 Abandoned Premises.** Buildings, structures and premises for which an owner cannot be identified or located by dispatch of a certificate of mailing to the last known or registered address, which persistently or repeatedly become unprotected or unsecured; which have been occupied by unauthorized persons or for illegal purposes; or which present a danger of structural collapse or fire spread to adjacent properties shall be considered abandoned, declared unsafe and abated or demolished in accordance with this code.

- **10.14.2 Safeguarding Vacant Premises.** Temporarily unoccupied buildings, structures, premises or portions thereof shall be secured and protected in accordance with section 10.14.
 - > **10.14.2.1 Security.** Exterior openings and interior openings accessible to other tenants or unauthorized persons shall be boarded, locked, blocked or otherwise protected to prevent entry by unauthorized individuals.
 - > **10.14.2.2 Fire Protection.** Fire alarm, sprinkler and standpipe systems shall be maintained in an operable condition at all times.
 - **Exceptions:**
 - 1. When the premises have been cleared of all combustible materials and debris and, in the opinion of the code official, the type of construction, fire separation distance and security of the premises do not create a fire hazard.
 - 2. Where buildings will not be heated and fire protection systems will be exposed to freezing temperatures, fire alarm and sprinkler systems are permitted to be placed out of service and standpipes are permitted to be maintained as dry systems (without an automatic water supply) provided the building has no contents or storage, and windows, doors and other openings are secured to prohibit entry by unauthorized persons.
 - > **10.14.2.3 Fire Separation.** Fire-resistance-rated partitions, fire barriers and fire walls separating vacant tenant spaces from the remainder of the building shall be maintained.

- **10.14.3 Removal of Combustibles.** Persons owning, or in charge or control of, a vacant building or portion thereof, shall remove all accumulations of combustible materials and flammable or combustible waste or rubbish from such space. The premises shall be maintained clear of waste or hazardous materials.
 - > **Exceptions:**
 - 1. Buildings or portions of buildings undergoing additions, alterations, repairs or change of occupancy under a valid permit in accordance with this code.
 - 2. Seasonally occupied buildings.
- **10.14.4 Removal of Hazardous Materials.** Persons owning, in charge of, or control of a vacant building or portion thereof, shall remove all accumulations of hazardous materials as defined by this code.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Windsor Fire Marshal's Office

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