

Crime Prevention advice for empty commercial premises

The Coronavirus has necessitated businesses close across London leaving many empty buildings: this will likely be the first time your building is going to be empty for an extended period of time. There is a concern that your property could be at risk of being targeted: this could potentially come in the form of an illegal occupation, the theft of stock or criminal damage.

The risk factor to your premises will naturally be dependent on a number of factors: area, local criminality, size, stock, security and this is an aide memoire for assisting you in your decision-making.

The Metropolitan Police Service are maintaining a visible presence across the capital and are committed to preventing any crime. However, we need your help to ensure that your buildings are as secure as they can be.

As a rule, it is important that you focus on the risks to your premises and regularly review your security. Work in partnership online to reduce the risk by sharing information with your local business community, crime reduction partnership and local police.

The restrictions on your movement will be prohibitive. Only travel where absolutely necessary. Please consider your health, colleagues, friends, families, and wider population.

Our Business Crime team are available for strategic support and connectivity where needed via email at businesscrime.mailbox@met.pnn.police.uk

The following information will help you protect your property:

1. Review your property portfolio

Conduct a detailed security review of all occupied and unoccupied property and land that you have responsibility for: use a systematic approach of reviewing your premises layer by layer, starting with the boundary and working your way inwards. Look for vulnerabilities in the space between the perimeter, any outbuildings and the main building. Out of sight, out of mind: Lock away any items that could be stolen, used as a climbing aide or targeted for arson.

2. Access and boundary treatments

Invest in a recognised security standard gate and locking mechanism, which is securely fixed to the ground and in alignment with the boundary fence. We recommended reviewing the Secured By Design website for further details. www.securedbydesign.com

Ensure your boundary is security rated and high enough to deter someone from climbing over it. We recommend a minimum height of 2.1 metres. Contact your local planning office for details of what height they will allow as a matter of course. There are a wide range of perimeter fences available with additional security features which will be sufficient to deter a physical attack. Some fencing options have a protruding topping that is difficult to climb, such as weld mesh (paladin), whilst allowing natural surveillance through the barrier. Some fencing can also incorporate lighting.

3. Prevent vehicular access on to the site 'Design out the space!'

A strong vehicle height restrictor can stop large vehicles entering your site.

If the site is closed, you can prohibit vehicular access to the entrance/boundary by securing it with heavy-duty concrete blocks or security rated bollards.

If your company has access to heavy-duty vehicle, you can deploy them in any outdoors areas thus 'designing out the space' for any prospective occupation. If you don't have any vehicles or trailers large enough to accomplish this, consider if there are any companies who could use the space for storage of their vehicles or freight and whether this a viable option for legitimately occupying the space. Parking vehicles close to or in front of the entrances to buildings can reduce vulnerability by making them harder to access. Please ensure this is safe to do so to comply with fire regulations.

4. Surveillance

In concert with 'government coronavirus policies', an SIA licensed security guard employed at the site could provide a permanent presence and quickly alert the authorities to any attempt to enter the property.

The coronavirus has completely redefined the way we interact (on the risk to the building and personal safety criterion) but there are accredited organisations who could provide a form of residency and permanent occupancy of the building in line with the government recommendations of self-isolation.

Note: Always be mindful of the personal safety of your staff and remind them to always call 999 in an emergency.

Having a monitoring station with remote access to the site means police and, if applicable, the local authority can be instantly notified upon an illegal entry, with or without a security presence on the site.

Ensure your CCTV system is an accredited system (correctly installed) and positioned in a way that will cover your premises and any vulnerable areas. Please ensure that your staff can operate the system in event of criminality. It should also not be in a position where it can be easily attacked or removed.

There are also CCTV systems available that you can link to an App on your phone allowing you to monitor your buildings. Some of these possess a vocal capacity, which is tremendously beneficial because you can 'communicate' with any intruder. Some have grown 'used to the presence of cameras' and simply presume no one is monitoring them-hearing a voice can change that. Two industry bodies accredit reputable CCTV companies: the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) and the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB).

Lighting affects behaviour. Ensure that your property has good lighting levels (we usually recommend BS5489- 2013). Bollard mounted lights are not recommended as they are prone to vandalism and do not sufficiently illuminate the face of any potential intruder.

5. Forensic marking

There are several property marking deterrents which can be used to enhance your security and protect your infrastructure and assets. These contain a unique traceable liquid/DNA code that can provide evidence of a vehicle or individual's presence at your property.

There are also similarly constructed DNA spray type devices available that can be linked into an intruder alarm system.

Highly visible warning signs will show your property is protected and warn of the dangers or consequences of entering.

6. Removing the utility supply

These amenities can be attractive to any would-be occupiers. Cutting-off the electric or water supply to the site, if they are not needed, may deter illegal occupiers. Be aware that removing them will impact on any security features you have such as an intruder alarm or CCTV. You will also have to consider fire regulations.

7. Protecting buildings within your site

The vulnerability of a building will depend on a number of factors including its location, local criminality and the type of boundary that exists. If the location is close to the boundary, it will make it easier to target, as there is no additional layer of protection.

Protect your doors and windows by using security accredited shutters or grilles. The security rating will be dependent on your building and its contents. Some venues have been targeted historically for illegal occupations and raves on account of having large rooms inside (halls, large dining areas etc.) so if these have entrance doors secure them. Add yet another tier of security. If using a security officer is not an option, consider using a timer switch to create 'the illusion of occupancy'.

Fit a monitored alarm to the building. This is a good deterrent and a variety of alarms are available. Two industry bodies accredit reputable companies: the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) and the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB).

We recommend the use of a timer switch, which suggests occupancy of a vacant premises during the hours of darkness.

Consider the use of fogging systems that activate upon an alarm being activated-these have a proven record of being dissuasive to criminality-you can't steal, what you can't see.

We recommend a safe, to the correct security and insurance accreditations, bolted to the floor and located in a safe and secluded location.

Lock valuable products away from any shop floor or visible location

This report gives recommendations. Please note that Crime Prevention Advice and the information in this report does not constitute legal or other professional advice; it is given free and without the intention of creating a contract or without the intention of accepting any legal responsibility. It is based on the information supplied and current crime trends in the area. All other applicable health, safety and fire regulations should be adhered to.

Yours sincerely

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