

## Idle/Vacant Buildings

### OVERVIEW OF ISSUE

Over time, all healthcare facilities require upgrading or replacement to comply with the latest regulations in the building code and/or patient care. These requirements may render a facility idle (generally an unoccupied facility with the possibility of some storage on the premises) or vacant (no storage or contents on the premises) during the transition period to new facilities. Such facilities are exposed to property risks including fire, windstorms, floods, earthquakes, freezing of pipes, arson, vandalism and incendiary fires. Continuing the operation and maintenance of fire protection systems, building/premises security, supervision and monitoring are key to addressing the risks associated with idle or vacant healthcare facilities/properties.

### KEY POINTS

- Operation and maintenance of fire protection systems, building/premises security, supervision and monitoring are key to addressing the risks associated with idle or vacant healthcare facilities/properties.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER

#### Security

- Secure (e.g. perimeter fencing and alarms, etc.) and control access to the premises and building(s) (provide locks and/or security guards).
- Conduct unscheduled periodic rounds of the property daily. Log all visitors and escort them at all times.
- Provide and maintain adequate grounds lighting. Ensure lawn and bushes are adequately trimmed.
- A Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) system with complete coverage of the area can be used as an alternative to security rounds. Ensure the monitoring station is located in a constantly attended area.
- Maintain or provide a security/burglar alarm system including, but not limited to, alarm contacts on doors and motion detectors.

#### Buildings and Premises

- Ensure provincial and municipal requirements and by-laws for idle or vacant healthcare facilities are met.
- Repair broken or missing windows and cover with sturdy wood boards.

- Secure all exterior doors, roof hatches and vents.
- Keep the building(s)' heat to at least 4.5°C (40°F). Provide a monitored low-temperature alarm for the building. Ensure the alarm is constantly monitored.
- Relocate any nearby yard storage to a safe distance from the building(s).
- Shut-off utilities, if not needed, and remove ignitable/flammable liquids storage.

#### Insurance

- Notify HIROC promptly of any idle or vacant buildings on the organization's property to ensure insurance coverage is in place.

#### Fire Protection

- If the building is protected with an automatic sprinkler system, continue with the operation, supervision and maintenance programs (as recommended by FM Global or at minimum, per appropriate fire code).
- Lock all fire protection control valves and conduct regular inspections. Automatic sprinkler impairments should be managed using a formal impairment program.

Page 1 of 2

## Idle/Vacant Buildings

---

- If it is impractical to heat the building, arrange the automatic sprinkler system for cold weather operation in accordance to appropriate codes/standards. **Do not drain the system and do not put it out of service.**
- Ensure fire protection control valves, fire department connections and hydrants (public or private) are cleared of any vegetation and other unnecessary combustibles or obstructions.
- Remove or minimize combustible storage and maintain good housekeeping in and around the building(s) (e.g. maintain cleanliness, no trash/rubbish, no unnecessary storage, etc.).
- Prevent hot work operations (e.g. welding, cutting, grinding, soldering, brazing, etc.). If hot work is needed, substitute hot work with other safer methods or use a formal hot work permit system.
- Inform the fire department of the facility's idle or vacant situation and provide access, when necessary.

### Supervision

- Conduct and document weekly visits/inspections of the premises to ensure that the above conditions are maintained.
- Include checks for any signs of breaches, intrusion and vandalism (e.g. on perimeter fences/gates, doors, windows and roof).
- Conduct periodic audits of inspection and security records and logs.
- Keep a record of false burglar and fire alarms. If known, record the cause. Review these records after each false alarm to check for patterns.



## REFERENCES

- ACE USA Property Engineering. (2009). Idle and vacant plant. [Checklist].
- FM Global. (2013). Protection against arson and other incendiary fires. [Data Sheet].
- FM Global. (2014). Understanding the hazard – arson and other incendiary fires.
- FM Global. (2014). Understanding the hazard – idle, vacant or strikebound facilities.
- Liberty Mutual Insurance. Loss lessons - vacant & idle buildings.
- Willis Group Holdings. (2010). Managing risks in vacant and idle buildings. Technical Advisory Bulletin.