

Loss Prevention Tips for Vacant School Buildings

From a risk management perspective, we recommend these steps for school buildings that are no longer used for regular operations, such as those awaiting reuse, sale, or demolition. The focus is preventing freeze-ups, water damage, equipment failure, fire, and vandalism during an extended vacancy.

- ☐ Before winter, have a qualified contractor inspect the building heating systems, including boilers, pumps, controls, and rooftop equipment where applicable. Confirm that areas containing water piping or fire sprinkler piping will receive adequate heat.
- ☐ For oil- or propane-heated buildings, check fuel levels and confirm scheduled deliveries will continue during the vacancy. For natural gas, verify that service and billing remain active.
- ☐ Maintain power to equipment needed to protect the building, such as heating controls, pumps, sump pumps, fire alarms, sprinkler equipment, intrusion alarms, and monitoring devices. Have qualified staff or contractors determine what other equipment can safely be shut down.
- ☐ Where feasible, shut off and drain unused domestic water lines, without affecting water supplies needed for fire protection. Do not drain or alter hydronic heating or sprinkler systems without qualified guidance. Use monitored low-temperature and leak sensors in mechanical rooms, pipe chases, and other vulnerable areas. Consider VSBIT's sensor program where monitoring is needed.
- ☐ Inspect the roof and drainage systems, including roof drains, scuppers, overflow outlets, flashing, and rooftop equipment, where present. Keep drainage paths clear and watch for leaks, ice buildup, or excessive snow accumulation. Use qualified personnel for roof access and maintenance.
- ☐ Maintain current emergency contacts with alarm-monitoring providers and local responders. Notify local police and fire departments when a building will be vacant for an extended period.
- ☐ Secure exterior doors, windows, and other access points. Maintain intrusion alarms and exterior lighting, and review keys, fobs, access codes, and vendor access. Confirm responding staff can enter the building in an emergency.
- ☐ Inspect building exteriors and grounds for damaged doors or windows, water entry, hazardous trees or limbs, and conditions that could block emergency vehicle or maintenance access.
- ☐ Keep fire alarm and automatic sprinkler systems in service where installed, including required monitoring. Maintain adequate heat wherever wet sprinkler piping is present, and power and heat for dry-system equipment and valve rooms. Consult your local fire marshal before changing or disabling any fire protection system.

Vacant School Building Quick Checklist

Use this as a practical control plan when a school building is vacant or closed for an extended period, rather than for routine school breaks.

Big picture: maintain heat, water protection, fire protection, security, and essential utilities, and document regular building checks.

Area	Action	Done
Heat/Freeze Protection	Service boilers, pumps, controls, and heating equipment before winter. Maintain heat in spaces with water or sprinkler piping; verify fuel or utility service.	
Water Damage Prevention	Shut off and drain unused domestic water where feasible. Monitor low temperatures and leaks around mechanical rooms, plumbing, and vulnerable piping.	
Fire Protection	Keep fire alarms, sprinkler systems, and monitoring active. Maintain power and heat needed for pumps, compressors, wet piping, and valve rooms.	
Routine Walkthroughs	Assign primary and backup inspectors. Document dates, conditions, alarms, repairs, and follow-up; increase inspections during severe weather.	
Security & Access	Secure entrances and review fob, key, and code access. Maintain intrusion alarms, exterior lighting, and current emergency contacts.	
Roof/Exterior	Inspect roof drains, scuppers, overflow outlets, rooftop equipment, and signs of water entry. Check snow/ice hazards, trees, and emergency access.	

Suggested Inspection Schedule

Weekly: Walk through the interior and exterior; check heating system status, alarm notifications, leaks, vandalism, and obvious damage. Increase inspections during severe weather.

Monthly: Check fuel and service status (more frequently as needed), sensor and alarm monitoring, access points, and outstanding repairs.

Before Winter: Service boilers and other heating equipment; confirm freeze protection, roof drainage, emergency contacts, and monitored sensors.

After Major Storms or Thaw: Check for roof drainage problems, leaks, ice or snow buildup, damaged rooftop equipment, downed limbs, and blocked access. Use qualified personnel for roof work.

Spring / Fall: Inspect roof drains and scuppers, review rooftop and mechanical equipment, and address exterior damage or vegetation hazards.

Tip: Keep an inspection log with photos and follow-up actions. Notify VSBIT if the building will be vacant long-term, permanently closed, or used for another purpose.