

Loss Prevention Tips for Vacant School Buildings

When schools are left vacant or unoccupied, there are proactive steps that should be taken to help prevent losses due to heating or electrical system malfunctions, water damage, vandalism, or other causes.

- ☐ Before the winter months, hire a contractor to inspect the heating system to ensure it is working properly to reduce any potential for freezing.
- ☐ If using LP gas, propane gas or oil heat, check the fuel level in the tank periodically to ensure it does not run out of fuel.
- ☐ A chimney service should inspect and clean any chimneys to ensure they are free from obstructions, such as nesting birds. Install chimney guard screencaps to help prevent infestation.
- ☐ If the hot water heating system and/or water pipes are not drained, install a waterflow sensor, leak detection sensor and low temperature sensor to be monitored by the alarm system. If not tied to alarm system utilize VSBIT sensor program. Keep the thermostat at a consistent temperature throughout the winter months. Increase temperature to 60 degrees during subzero weather.
- ☐ Check and clean gutters, downspouts and roof drains in the spring and fall. Clogged gutters and drains can result in basement flooding when the snow melts in northern climates and/or water damage to interior walls in any climate as the water is no longer channeled properly.
- ☐ Notify the police department that the property will be vacant and provide emergency notification phone numbers to the police.
- ☐ Secure external doors and windows with deadbolt locks, security-type hinges and sturdy door frames that cannot be spread apart. Install slide locks or other equivalent security locks on sliding glass doors or French doors in residential type buildings.
- ☐ Remove dead trees or overhanging large tree limbs from the school property that could cause damage
- ☐ Automatic fire protection systems should be left in service. Adequate building heat must be maintained where wet fire protection systems exist. Where dry systems exist, power must be maintained for the air compressors, as well as heat for the valve rooms.

Vacant School Building Quick Checklist

Use this as a simple control plan when a school building is vacant, closed for an extended period, or only checked occasionally.

Big picture: keep heat and fire protection working, prevent water damage, secure the building, and document regular walkthrough.

Area	Action	Done
Heat/Freeze Protection	Have the heating system inspected before winter. Check fuel levels routinely. Keep thermostats set to a consistent temperature.	
Water Damage Prevention	Where feasible, shut off and drain domestic water lines. If water or hydronic heat remains active, use low-temperature and water/leak sensors.	
Fire Protection	Keep automatic fire protection systems in service. Maintain heat for wet systems and power/heat for dry system compressors and valve rooms.	
Routine Walkthroughs	Assign someone to inspect the building on a set schedule. Document each check, including date, person, conditions found, and any follow-up.	
Security	Secure exterior doors and windows. Maintain alarm monitoring, exterior lighting, emergency contacts, and consider notifying local police/fire that the building is vacant.	
Roof/Drainage/Exterior	Clean gutters, downspouts, and roof drains. Remove dead trees or overhanging limbs and check for storm damage or signs of water entry.	

Suggested Inspection Schedule

Weekly: Walk through interior/exterior; check heat, alarms, leaks, vandalism, unusual odors, and obvious damage.

Monthly: Check fuel levels, sensor/alarm status, doors/windows, fire protection status, and document any maintenance needs.

Before Winter: Service heating system, confirm freeze protection, clear roof drains/gutters, confirm emergency contacts, and verify sensors are active.

After Major Storms or Thaw: Check roof, gutters, drains, basement/low areas, downed limbs, water entry, and exterior damage.

Spring / Fall: Clean gutters/downspouts/roof drains; inspect chimney if applicable; remove dead trees or overhanging limbs.

Tip: Keep a simple log with photos when conditions change. A short record of regular checks is often more useful than a long plan nobody uses.