

Code Compliance

— guidelines on Seattle regulations governing safety and quality of life

Maintaining Vacant Business Properties

March 20, 2020

The City of Seattle has regulations and standards for maintaining vacant properties. These standards focus on keeping buildings closed to unauthorized entry and maintaining the structure and yard areas to prevent the accumulation of waste and deterioration of the building.

Securing the Building

Often, locking your doors and windows and making sure your exterior lights are functioning is enough. If a door or window is broken, you must cover it with hardened polycarbonate (plexiglass or clear board), plywood, or metal. At least one door must remain functional, though locked, to allow entry by first responders if needed. (See details below for closure standards.)

Utility Connections

Utility connections must be maintained to the same standards of safety and operability as in an occupied building unless the fixtures and equipment are completely removed and utilities terminated.

Exterior Areas

Provide basic weather protection and keep the roof and gutters in good repair. Clear overgrown vegetation and keep all outdoor areas free of litter, junk, and inoperable vehicles. A security service that periodically checks on or patrols the exterior of the building can sometimes be a good investment. Fencing can help secure a site for a lengthy closure, but is seldom used for temporary closures.

Closure Standards

Polycarbonate: Hardened polycarbonate panels are stronger and lighter than plywood. Manufacturers provide good installation instructions. Usually they recommend panels be applied from the inside of the structure and that the panels extend several inches

beyond the edge of windows. The US Fire Administration within FEMA has been recommending polycarbonate for securing vacant buildings for about two years. See www.usfa.fema.gov/current_events/041718.html or search under “clear boarding” online for more information.

Plywood: Plywood sheets of at least 1/2” thickness (3/4” preferred), must be painted or treated to protect the plywood from the elements. Cut the plywood to fit inside the opening, glue around the edges and fasten with square or star-headed woodscrews spaced no more than 9 inches on center. OSB (oriented strand board) is not allowed.

Steel security panels: consult with SDCI. Steel panels often need interior cross-bracing for attachment.

Exterior doors: You may use any secure deadbolt, dead-latch, or hasp with a padlock. You may also toenail the door to the door frame using 10D or 16D galvanized nails or minimum 3 to 4 inch #10 or #12 screws.

City Vacant Building Monitoring Program

The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections has a vacant building monitoring program that focuses primarily on problem properties. If we receive a complaint about your vacant property we will issue a notice and tell you what to do to bring the property back into compliance. Please reach out promptly to the Vacant Building inspector for your area if we contact you about a complaint. More information about the vacant building monitoring program is on the SDCI website: www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/common-code-questions/vacant-buildings. We encourage you to contact the Vacant Building inspector for your area if you begin to have problems on your property.

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