

Crime prevention advice for empty commercial premises

The Coronavirus has seen many businesses close across the West Midlands, leaving buildings empty for an extended period of time. Here is useful advice for you to consider to protect your premises during this time.

Potential problems may be illegal occupation, theft of stock or criminal damage. The risk factor to your premises will depend on a number of factors: area, local criminality, size, stock, and security.

West Midlands Police are maintaining a visible presence across our communities 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, and that of your colleagues, friends, families, and wider population.

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. Review your premises by starting at 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 at [securedbydesign.com](https://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. There are a wide range of perimeter fences available, some with additional security features which may deter a physical attack. Some fencing options include a protruding topping that is difficult to climb but still allow natural surveillance through the barrier, and others could include lighting.

3. Prevent vehicle access on to the site

A strong vehicle height restrictor can stop large vehicles entering your site. If the site is closed, you can prohibit vehicle 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 vehicles, you can utilise them in your outdoor grounds, preventing prospective occupation. If you don't have any vehicles or trailers large enough to do this, consider if there are other companies who could use the space for storage of their vehicles. Parking vehicles close to, or in front of the entrances to buildings can reduce vulnerability by making them harder to access. Remember to ensure the above is safe to do so, legitimate, and maintains compliance with fire regulations.

4. Surveillance

Together with the 'government coronavirus policies', an SIA licensed security guard employed at the site could provide a permanent presence and quickly alert the authorities to any criminal attempt to enter the property. The [SIA website](#) advice on key worker status for the private security industry.

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.

Having a monitoring station with remote access to the site means the police can be instantly alerted to an illegal entry, with or without on site security.

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

There are also CCTV systems available that can link to an app on your phone. Some include vocal features, meaning you could 'communicate' with any intruder. Some intruders have become used to the presence of CCTV and assume no one is monitoring them. Hearing a voice can change that. Two industry bodies accredited reputable CCTV companies are: the National Security Inspectorate (NSI), and the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB).

Lighting affects behaviour, so check your property has good lighting levels (BS5489-2013 for public spaces). We recommend constant low level dusk-till-dawn lighting which can be enhanced by motion detector lighting if needed. Bollard mounted lights are not recommended as they are prone to vandalism and do not sufficiently illuminate the face of any potential intruder.

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

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.

Visible warning signs will show your property is protected and warn of the consequences if they enter.

6. Removing the utility supply

These amenities can be attractive to any potential occupiers. If not needed (and in line with fire regulations), cutting off electric and water supplies to the site may deter occupiers. Be aware that removing them will impact on any security features you have such as an intruder alarm or CCTV.

7. Protecting buildings within your site

If the building location is close to the site 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. Historically some venues have been targeted for illegal occupations and raves on account of having large rooms inside, such as halls and large dining areas, so make their entrances secure. If on-site security is not an option, consider using a timer switch to create the illusion someone is there.

Also fit a monitored alarm to the building. Two industry bodies accredit reputable companies are: the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) and the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB). Consider the use of fogging systems that activate upon an alarm being triggered. These have a proven record of being to halting criminality as you can't steal what you can't see.

Remember to lock valuable products away from any shop floor or visible location. We recommend a safe (to the correct security and insurance accreditations), bolted to the floor and located in a secure and secluded location.

For further guidance and advice visit:

[The National Business Crime Centre website.](#)

[The NBCC construction on site security guide.](#)

[The West Midlands Police, business crime prevention page.](#)