

RISK INSIGHTS

Protecting Recreational Vacant Property

The insurance risks and liabilities associated with owning unoccupied property can be extensive. To ensure you are adequately protected, it is important to know the risks you confront. In addition to purchasing comprehensive insurance coverage, there are numerous preventive strategies for maintaining vacant property to reduce risk and liability.

Potential Risks

There are a host of risks and concerns associated with owning vacant property. Vacant buildings or cabins are an obvious target for theft, trespassing and vandalism. For example, the rising cost of copper has given rise to an increase in the theft of copper pipes from vacant properties. Yes, the cabin may be off the grid, but exposure still exist. In addition to any loss or property damage that may occur, keep in mind that the owner of a property can be held liable for criminal activities or accidents that take place on the premises.

In addition, vacant properties are susceptible to undetected damages, such as fire, water damage, electrical explosions, wind or hail damage, and mold. A study by the U.S. Fire Administration shows that around 30,000 fires occur every year in vacant homes or buildings, costing \$900 million annually in direct property damage. Many of these incidents occur in vacant buildings due to small, undetected maintenance issues (where someone in an occupied building would have recognized and handled the problem before it caused a larger loss).

The owner may be held liable for any hazardous materials that contaminate groundwater or other nearby

natural resources. Also, underground fuel tanks present serious challenges and thus should be frequently and carefully inspected.

Other Ways to Mitigate Risk

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- Prevent vandalism – Notify local authorities of vacated properties so they can watch for criminal behavior. Maintain an “occupied” appearance to the property—install light timers and/or a security system.
- Limit liability - Make sure property is free from significant hazards (broken railings or steps, broken windows, etc) that could cause injuries to anyone on the property – this could include maintenance workers, firefighters or even trespassers.
- Avoid damage – Performing regular maintenance on the property can decrease the odds of damage. Make sure the heating system and chimney are cleaned and inspected regularly. Have the plumbing system winterized to prevent frozen pipes.

Provided by CAA Value Insurance Program

Protecting Vacant Property

Periodically inspect the roof, insulation, attic, basement, gutters and other areas of the cabin for any necessary repairs, mold, damage or other problems. Remove all access material and combustibles from in and around the building.

Insuring Residential Properties

Most insurance companies include a clause that the homeowner's insurance will expire if a home is left vacant for more than 30 or 60 days (depending on the policy). Therefore, a cabin owner insuring their cabin as a secondary home may need to review this section. This leaves the property owner financially vulnerable for all the risks previously noted. However, many insurance companies do offer vacant property insurance (also known as vacant building insurance or vacant dwelling insurance).

Because of the increased risks and liability associated with a vacant property, these types of insurance tend to be costly – ranging from one and a half to five times the cost of a property insurance policy. It is important, though, to look beyond the price and consider the suitability and comprehensiveness of the coverage being purchased.

For more information about vacant property insurance and other strategies to help protect your assets and mitigate loss, contact us today at 1-888-454-9562