

April 4, 2018

Bulletin 2018–001-FI

Security of Vacant Buildings

The Fire By-law Sentence 2.4.6.1.(1) of Division B requires that vacant buildings be secured against unauthorized entry.

If a building is vacant and shows signs of disrepair, or if the property has perimeter fencing or construction hoarding but the building has not yet been demolished, the building must be secured against unauthorized entry that could lead to fire hazards.

In addition, the Standards of Maintenance By-law prescribes standards for the maintenance and occupancy of building sites within the City of Vancouver to ensure that such buildings and sites are free from hazard and are maintained continuously in conformity with accepted health, fire and building requirements



Board Up Standard

The following is considered the minimum standard for board up for providing security against unauthorized entry to vacant buildings:

1. Board-up of all windows and doorways is done with the following materials:
 - a. Plywood sheets of minimum 5/8" thickness
 - b. Studs minimum 2 x 4
 - c. 3" screws, both Robertson and Phillips
 - d. 3" screws capable of drilling into metal
 - e. 3" nails
2. Method of board-up is done as follows:
 - a. Using the above said required materials fastened with alternating Phillips head Robertson head 3" screws intermingled with 3" nails to board up structure.
 - b. Using the above said required materials fastened with 3" metal use screws to drill into metal (door and window frames for example).
 - c. Fasteners are spaced not more than 6" apart.
 - d. All windows and doors within easy access from ground, decks or roofs are boarded.
 - e. All broken windows and doors open to the elements are boarded.

-
3. All broken glass on the premises, on city property or sidewalk, which has fallen from the building, is swept up and removed to a safe area

Swimming pools must also be secured to prevent deaths or injury from drowning and falls.

Building owners can install the boards themselves, or they can employ a company that specializes in this service in accordance with the above noted standards. Experience has shown that board-ups using ½” thick plywood or fasteners less than 3” long are too easily broken through.

Removing Fire Hazards

The Fire By-law Sentence 2.4.1.1.(1) of Division B requires that combustible waste materials in and around buildings must not be permitted to accumulate in quantities or locations that will constitute an undue fire hazard.

Sentence 1.4.2.16.(1) of Division C provides that, where in the opinion of the Fire Chief, a condition exists may cause fire or explosion, or may increase the risk of fire, explosion or danger to persons or property, the Fire Chief may issue an order to the owner, requiring removal of the hazard or risk within a specified time. Accordingly, when a building is vacant and boarded up or no longer intended for occupancy:

1. Natural gas supply to the property is to be disconnected. The building owner or representative is to notify and request the utility company to disconnect the natural gas service as soon as practicable.
2. Unless the building has an active monitored intruder alarm system, or an active monitored fire alarm system (note that local smoke alarm devices are not part of a fire alarm system), the electrical service to the property is to be disconnected. The building owner or representative is to notify and request the utility company to disconnect the electrical service as soon as practicable.

Note that the Ticket Offences By-law authorizes the Fire Chief to issue municipal tickets against the building owner or representative in the amount of up to \$750 per day a building is found to be unsecured against unauthorized entry, or fire hazards have not been removed.

Signed,

Rick Cheung, P.Eng. CP, FEC
Assistant Chief Fire Protection Engineer

Ray Bryant
Assistant Chief Community Safety

Rob Renning
Deputy Chief Community Safety