



What You Need to Know About the Protection and Management of Dark Properties During the COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis presents business owners with unique challenges on many fronts. From supporting personnel to maintaining product delivery, the “new normal” in business means taking on the unforeseen. With so many balls to juggle, the management and security of temporarily vacated commercial real estate may not be at the top of the priorities list. But that could prove to be a big mistake.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis is driving increases in criminal behavior at commercial properties. That’s why now more than ever, the security and maintenance of business real estate can’t slip off the radar. A recent *New York Post* article¹ stated that commercial burglaries in New York had risen 75 percent between March 12 and March 31, according to the NYPD. The uptick occurred directly after a state of emergency was declared pushing citizens to stay at home.

This data suggests that orders designed to protect citizens can also present challenges for business owners, particularly in areas that have been hit hard by the virus. Even with orders for people to stay at home, criminals remain active – and vacant facilities are prime targets despite the many modern security provisions at play.

Fuel for Criminal Behavior

One of the key drivers for the increase in this type of crime may be the spike in joblessness associated with the COVID-19 crisis. The unemployment rate is at a record high in many states with millions of Americans out of work. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics², unemployed numbers increased by 1.4 million to 7.1 million in March 2020. The sharp increase is attributed to efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

It's not a huge leap in logic to see how joblessness and a lack of income correlate with increases in crime. After all, desperate times often lead to desperate actions. However, increased unemployment isn't the only potential catalyst for criminal activity.

The reality, with shelter in place orders and social distancing, is that people have a lot more free time on their hands. Those who are so inclined have ample opportunity to plan and carry out criminal activity, especially with law enforcement spread thin in some areas due to illness or cutbacks. Not to mention the number of dark commercial properties now available to target.

Crimes to Consider

Every business has different security concerns, but when it comes to temporarily dark or vacant commercial real estate, three common issues are trespassing, burglary, and vandalism. The extent to which these crimes are prevalent depends on the location, condition and current security of a given property, as well as public perception of the business residing at the location. If the public has an ax to grind with the employer, the occurrence of crimes like trespassing and vandalism is likely to increase.



- **Trespassing:** In particular, this can be an issue if your building is located where homeless people are known to congregate or if employees are disgruntled. If your facility appears to be vulnerable, it gives people the green light to damage or occupy your building or utilize your grounds for illegal activity. Trespassers also may endanger themselves and become a burden on your insurance coverage should any life safety issues exist.
- **Burglary:** If there are any valuable goods/merchandise, machinery or equipment in your dark facility, this could make it a target for theft. But it doesn't stop there. Historically, thieves have been known to target non-operating facilities to take copper piping and wiring from the walls.
- **Vandalism:** This may come from disgruntled employees or citizens who want to make a statement. Vandalism includes the deliberate destruction or damage to property, such as breaking windows, spray painting walls, dumping trash, and knocking over signage.

How to Stay Protected

There's no one-size-fits-all solution for commercial real estate maintenance and security. Your risk can depend on many factors, including geography, crime rates in your areas, the volume of COVID-19 cases, the condition of your properties and security systems (and potential vulnerabilities of your systems), to name a few. However, there are several smart steps you can take to get started:

- **Limit building access:** If most or all of your personnel aren't working on site, consider changing existing locking systems/codes or installing temporary ones. If you do have a limited number of employees working onsite regularly, limit the timing of building access.
- **Inform local authorities:** Notify your local fire and police departments that your building is not operating or on a reduced schedule. Make sure that authorities know how and where to access locking systems or a Knox Box in the event of an emergency.
- **Evaluate remote security:** This is a good time to evaluate if there are any limitations to remote security monitoring. Identify if alerts are working properly and if you can access or remotely view all key areas of the interior and exterior of your facility.
- **Inspect and document:** On a recurring basis, take a look at your facility and document its existing condition. A failure to consistently document the condition of the property after vacancy may put you at risk of losing insurance coverage for theft, vandalism, and more.

Ultimately, one of the best ways to stay protected is to get professional help. At Commercial Asset Preservation (CAP), we specialize in the protection and preservation of vacant commercial buildings. Our services ensure that properties are maintained in a way that retains value and ensures greater security.

Trust the Professionals

Since our launch in 2009, CAP has become the go-to resource nationwide for inspection, maintenance and repair services for dozens of well-known retailers, landlords, REITs, financial institutions, receivers, and other parties responsible for commercial real estate.

CAP has a proven track record of maintaining the value of both vacant and occupied commercial real estate across the United States through its network of locally-based professional commercial contractors. At temporarily closed buildings, CAP can conduct recurring exterior inspections to report evidence of vandalism, security concerns, life safety issues, and possible municipal code violations. We help our customers identify any issues of concern and perform emergency property repairs without delay.

These are just a few of the reasons why CAP is a smart choice for your business:

- **Unmatched experience:** Our operations team has managed the maintenance and inspection of well over one million (1,000,000) retail, restaurant, medical, hospitality, institutional, office, and industrial properties. With these many properties processed, we have seen the good, the bad and the ugly. CAP feels confident in saying that it has experienced nearly every type of conceivable scenario that can occur with a building. As a result, we do not panic when issues come up. We simply use our experience and our extensive contractor resources to provide our clients with a solution that saves them money and places their property in a condition that meets the needs of the client and the municipality, all the while retaining property value.
- **Specialized focus:** CAP is the only company in the United States predominately focused on providing services at commercial properties that are vacated. We believe our unique niche allows for a greater concentration on an aspect of the real estate world that many would consider an afterthought.
- **Nationwide reach:** We support businesses of all kinds across the country with a nationwide team of local independent contractors. That means your business has access to a highly-skilled resource to protect and preserve your property, even in emergencies, without delay. Our contractors are familiar with the neighborhoods in which these properties reside and the requirements of local officials.

Protect the business you've worked hard to build. Reach out to discuss how Commercial Asset Preservation can protect your property now and in the future.

Contact CAP (216) 765-1220, inquiries@commercialpreservation.com

¹ [“Commercial burglaries soar since coronavirus emergency measures.”](#) *New York Post*, April 6, 2020.

² [“The Employment Situation – March 2020.”](#) *U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics*, April 2, 2020.