

Advice for Small Businesses that close down over Xmas and the New Year

A business that is closed during the Xmas and New Year period, especially one that is located on a remote commercial estate where other businesses might also close at the same time, will be vulnerable to criminal attack simply because the guardianship provided by its staff will be absent over a long period. Not only that, but there will also be a heightened risk from power failures and bad weather conditions, simply because nobody will be there to spot the problems or deal with them in a timely fashion.

Planning ahead then is vital but as you will see from the suggestions below much of what is proposed should be part of your regular housekeeping arrangements anyway.

You may well think of other measures you should be taking as you run through the list, but above all think business continuity all the way!

- **INSURERS:** During a business close down it is vital to follow any guidance given or conditions imposed by your insurers
- **YARDS:** Ensure that external yards are left tidy and, if you can, bring in equipment and materials that you might otherwise leave outside. Pay particular attention to materials and other objects that could either be stolen or used by the thief to break into the main building or outbuildings. Reduce the risk of arson by securing materials such as timber and fuels
- **OUTBUILDINGS:** Ensure that outbuildings, especially those used for the storage of materials attractive to the thief are secured in the manner required by your insurers
- **GRAFFITI:** Graffiti that is present should be removed in good time for the close-down as graffiti tags often attract further attacks
- **SECURITY LIGHTING:** If the building and its curtilage benefits from a good level of natural surveillance from the street then it would be prudent to operate some low energy internal and external lights during closure. Try not to illuminate areas of the building or yard that have little or no surveillance prospects as this could aid the thief. To that end ensure that lamps are working and new lightings are fitted in plenty of time for the close-down. Also ensure that high hedges are trimmed and report street lamp outages to the council
- **CCTV:** If the building has a CCTV system ensure that it is working correctly and will continue to do so during the close-down
- **ALARM SYSTEMS:** Ensure that the Fire and Intruder alarms have been serviced and are working effectively
- **KEYHOLDERS:** If you enjoy automatic police response to activations of your alarm system make sure you have supplied your Alarm Monitoring Centre (ARC) with an up-to-date list of keyholders. The ARC must hold the details of at least 2 keyholders or the details of a central keyholding service. Keyholders must be able to attend your business within 20 minutes at any time of the day and night, have access to the relevant parts of the business, be able to operate the alarm and be contactable by phone. The police service does not hold keys but Lancashire Police provide a 'Key Point' service for businesses. For information about this service please visit; www.lancashire.police.uk
- **GUARDING COMPANY:** If you employ the services of a guarding company then you should inform them of your close-down arrangements in good time
- **SAFE:** If you do not have an insurance rated safe consider getting one (a fire resistant safe is advisable) and make sure it is bolted into the floor/wall
- **WEATHER DISRUPTION:** Think about the weather and what the forecast is telling you. Poor weather conditions can adversely affect businesses (phone and power outages, freezing pipes, IT cooling system breakdown etc) and can disrupt your eventual return to work. Planning ahead and organising back-up plans for weather disruption would be sensible – i.e.

back-up generators, power failure alarm, regular visits to the building by assigned staff members

- **EMERGENCY STAFF CONTACT:** Although you would not wish to disrupt a staff member's holiday make sure that several staff members hold the contact details of key members of staff in case of emergencies
- **INFORMING CUSTOMERS/SUPPLIERS:** It may be prudent to inform customers that you are closing for the Xmas period or other holiday and it may also be necessary to provide suppliers and customers with details about how to contact a member of staff in an emergency
- **MAIL DELIVERY:** If delivered mail and parcels cannot be delivered to your building during close-down then arrange to have mail held at the post office or delivered elsewhere. Otherwise a member of staff may have to periodically visit the premises to check the mail. The type of mail post box you use can make a difference to your arrangements in this respect. For example, a large secure mail box may have sufficient capacity for the close-down period
- **LOCKING-UP ROUTINE:** Ensure that the main building has been properly secured and the alarm has been set. To that end develop a locking up checklist and routine and assign the responsibility for the final security inspection to a senior member of staff. This checklist might include some or all of the following tasks
 1. **ELECTRICITY:** Ensure that all unnecessary electrical equipment has been turned off, which may include unplugging from the mains. i.e. computers, servers, kettles, machinery. Turning off unnecessary equipment will also save on energy costs
 2. **GAS:** Where practical turn off the gas supply
 3. **VEHICLES:** If vehicles are being left on site ensure they have been emptied of tools and materials and locked and that the keys have been left in the safe or taken off site if that is normal practice
 4. **OFFICE EQUIPMENT:** Remove post-it notes carrying passwords from computers and discourage staff from doing this. Laptops left at work and other expensive office equipment should be locked away securely
 5. **INTERNAL DOORS:** Close all internal doors in case there is a fire to help prevent the spread of fire and smoke
 6. **EXTERNAL DOORS AND WINDOWS:** Close and lock all windows, including rooflights and secondary exit doors and pull down and lock any shutters and or grilles.
 7. **IS EVERYBODY OUT?:** Check every room in the building, including the toilets, to ensure that everybody has gone home before locking the final exit door and setting the alarm(s)
 8. **PERIMETER CHECK:** Lastly, make a final check of the perimeter fence and make sure any gate within it has been locked in accordance with your insurers' requirements

This guidance was specifically prepared for Lancashire Constabulary by Calvin Beckford, owner and operator of www.thecrimepreventionwebsite.com The guidance may be used by all police services providing there is an acknowledgement to its source