

# Factsheet 3

## Keeping your house safe from crime and damage while it's unoccupied.

When unscrupulous people know houses are unoccupied for long periods the house can be subjected to break-ins and damage. Here are some useful tips to keep your unoccupied house safe:

### Make the property look lived in

- ✓ Fit a time switch so that the internal lights operate during the hours of darkness
- ✓ Keep the garden and the exterior of the property tidy and in a good state of repair
- ✓ Make sure all the post is pushed through the letter box and not left on display
- ✓ Leave curtains or blinds in place
- ✓ Make sure refuse bins are emptied and then stored in a safe place
- ✓ If there is a trusted neighbour, ask them to open and close curtains
- ✓ If the property is for sale or rent consider whether an advertising board is really necessary

### Proper security

- ✓ Keep all doors and windows locked and secured
- ✓ Depending on the location of the property consider external lighting
- ✓ Ask trusted neighbours to contact the police in case of an emergency
- ✓ Check door locks and upgrade where necessary

### More general advice

- ✓ If a house alarm is fitted make sure it is activated and key holder details are available
- ✓ If the property has parking facilities invite neighbours to use them while the house is vacant
- ✓ All your property inside should be marked.  
See [www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com)



- ✓ A full and detailed inventory should be taken and maintained
- ✓ Cut back trees or shrubs to remove hidden areas where burglars may hide or where people might flytip
- ✓ Make regular visits to the property
- ✓ Do a bit of gardening often on regular visits to keep it under control

### Prepare for winter!

It's amazing how many people suffer damage to their unoccupied houses by not preparing for winter properly, with burst pipes causing thousands of pounds of damage. If you have a property being left empty over the winter it is important to prepare for the cold temperatures and damp – don't be caught unaware – lag pipes, check insulation and have the heating system checked out.

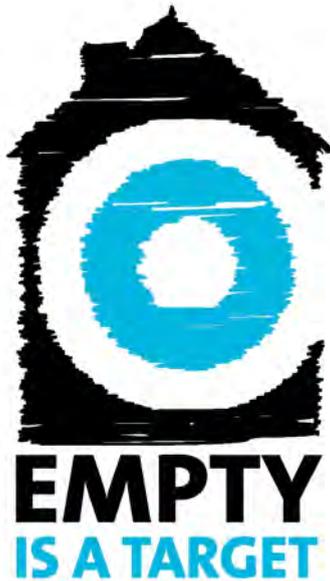
## Useful tips

- If possible don't switch the heating off. Leave it on at a low setting or set the timer so it comes on at least once a day. (Please check your insurance covers you to do this)
- If you can't leave the heating on or very cold conditions are forecast, turn off the water supply and drain the system by leaving the taps to run dry.
- Ask a neighbour or friend to check on your home in particularly cold spells. If this isn't possible, leave a key or your contact details with a neighbour in case of emergencies.
- Lag pipes, especially outside pipes and taps (for example, garden taps) and those in rooms that are not heated (for example, the garage) to help prevent freezing.

### If there is a burst pipe:

- Immediately turn off the water at the stopcock.
- If water is coming through the ceiling drain the system by opening the taps and flushing toilets.
- Call a plumber, and call an electrician to make sure the wiring is safe before you use the lights and sockets.

For more information visit  
[www.no-use-emptywest.co.uk](http://www.no-use-emptywest.co.uk)



Unoccupied homes in disrepair can attract crime to the neighbourhood making neighbourhoods and neighbours feel less safe.

There is also a risk to your insurance claims if there is seen to be inadequate safeguarding including insufficient security or fire protection measures. So it's very important to keep your house in a good and cared for condition. The best thing you can do is to get your house occupied by renting it out or selling it.

## Other factsheets available:

**Factsheet 1:** What shall I do with my property now no one is living there?

**Factsheet 2:** Letting your house or flat

**Factsheet 4:** VAT, Planning Control and Building Regulations

**Factsheet 5:** The costs and risks of owning an empty home

**Factsheet 6:** What legal action can a council take with long term empty homes?

The negative effect of letting your house look uncared for when unoccupied.

Houses and gardens can fall very quickly into disrepair without regular maintenance and visits.

One unrepaired broken window can attract another being broken, then another.

Not only can this have a detrimental impact on you (making it more difficult to bring it back to a habitable condition, as well as it becoming an increasing burden), but it can have a negative impact on the local area – making it less pleasant to live in for your neighbours.

There's lots of information at  
[www.no-use-emptywest.co.uk](http://www.no-use-emptywest.co.uk)

You can talk to someone for advice by calling your local authority in the area you live:

**Bath and North East Somerset:**  
01225 396411

**Bristol:** 0117 352 5010

**North Somerset:** 01934 426885

**South Gloucestershire:** 01454 865 565