



# Property owners guide

Shrinking your biggest risks and hazards



# Protecting your property

We've taken a good look at the top five risks and hazards you face as a landlord in the UK – the ones that cause the most losses, damage and interruptions in your sector – and pulled together this guide to help you manage them.

Follow the advice in this booklet and you won't go far wrong.

# Start as you mean to go on

## Find the right tenants

It's important to remember that all risks can be better mitigated with the right tenants. You may want to think about using the services of a vetting company. For a fee, they'll carry out checks and provide you with a report based on some or all of the information listed below. Like anything, expect to pay slightly more for a more in-depth report.

- Failure to pay rent to previous landlords
- Damage caused to previous properties
- Income-related enquiries
- Credit checks
- ID verification checks
- Written verification of employment/income
- References from their current landlord or letting agent
- An affordability calculation

With this information to hand, you'll be able to make an informed choice on which tenants you let your property to.

## Inspect your property regularly

Good risk management for landlords starts with inspections. It's always a good idea to inspect your property regularly. Where a physical inspection isn't possible, you should consider any realistic alternatives. For example, video inspections, inspections by agents, even external inspections through windows.

As a landlord, you can then feel confident that you're putting the right measures in place to limit your exposure to any of the risks we'll go through in this guide.



# Electrical fires

## ? Did you know...?

Most electrical fires happen because people are using equipment incorrectly, or because it's poorly maintained.

In fact, a whopping...



**26% of accidental fires in the UK are down to faulty equipment and leads.<sup>1</sup>**

Landlords – both commercial and residential – have a legal duty to make sure everyone is safe from the dangers of electricity. So, frequent inspections of fixed and portable electrical items is essential. As are system and equipment checks.

<sup>1</sup> RSA claims experience

## 👍👎 Dos and don'ts

- Regularly inspect all electrical equipment, wiring and overall installations and make sure they're maintained in line with BS7671 (IET Wiring Regulations). Commercial and residential landlords are responsible for the electrical system and any electrical appliances provided with the tenancy. Legislation can vary between residential and commercial landlords and by country – we recommend researching what legislation you need to comply with and confirming this with your broker. Some links are provided below to help.
- Fix quickly any remedial work that the inspections identify are essential
- Don't store any combustible materials near electrical switchgear, distribution boards and/or light fittings
- Make sure all non-critical electrical equipment is turned off at night and when no one's there
- Examine portable electrical appliances regularly – at least yearly. Equipment that's used a lot, such as a vacuum cleaner, needs to be examined more often, along with equipment used in harsh environments
- If you're responsible for onsite electrical substations and high-voltage switchgear, you should regularly inspect and maintain the installation

## i Find out more...

You can find competent electricians through the following links:

[NICEIC – NICEIC contractor search](#)

[ECA – ECA contractor search](#)

[NAPIT – NAPIT contractor search](#)

## ☑ Plan ahead and follow up

- Find out when your next periodic inspection is due and set reminders
- Look for signs of physical damage to parts of the system and arrange for it to be fixed by a competent electrician where you find issues
- Keep a copy of the EICR (electrical inspection condition report) and also written evidence of any remedial work completed afterwards
- Make sure anyone who works on or with electrical equipment has had suitable training, knowledge, experience and supervision

And you can find more information at:

[IET – BS7671 wiring regulations](#)

[RSA Insurance – Risk consulting](#)

[Letting a property – Mandatory electrical safety inspections for 2021](#)

[GOV.UK – Guidance for landlords and tenants](#)

[England – Electrical safety for landlords](#)

[Scotland – Electrical safety for landlords](#)

[Northern Ireland – Electrical safety in rented accommodation](#)

[HSE – Electrical safety at work](#)

[HSENI – Electrical safety at work](#)

[HSE – Electrical switchgear safety](#)

# Empty premises

## Did you know...?

Empty buildings present you with greater risks as they're more susceptible to malicious activity such as theft, arson, vandalism and stripping of utilities and materials. They're also more prone to water damage – whether from environmental causes or as a result of pipes or boilers being stolen. If leaks go unnoticed the damage can be catastrophic.

An incredible...



**£500 million**  
worth of damage is done  
each year to vacant  
properties in the UK through  
vandalism and arson alone.<sup>2</sup>

## Dos and don'ts

- Arrange for the gas, electricity, water and any other fuel supplies to be isolated at the mains, and drain down the water system once isolated
- Where there are electronic security or fire systems to protect the premises, arrange for the other parts of the system to be isolated. For a flat or apartment, isolate the individual flat
- Make sure the building is secure to prevent casual entry. Use good quality deadlocks, ideally to BS3621, or a good quality close-shackle padlock and matching pad bar on all external doors. Where there are window locks, make sure they're used, otherwise screw the windows shut
- Repair any broken windows, or board them outside with 19mm-thick shuttering-grade plywood braced and secured to prevent forced entry
- Arrange for the building and outside areas to be cleared of all unfixed combustible materials, including junk mail and newspapers
- Seal letterboxes or fit a stout internal cage
- Consider using anti-climb paint on drainpipes and gutters to restrict access to roofs
- Consider using the services of a company that specialises in protecting vacant properties. Brokers should be able to help you with this

## Plan ahead and follow up

- Inspect the building inside and out at least every seven days to make sure it's still secure and that combustible materials haven't been fly-tipped around it. Keep a record of your visits
- Where you see damage, arrange for it to be repaired. And where you see combustible waste, arrange for it to be removed
- Let the local police force know straightaway that the building has been targeted
- Use a specialist contractor to manage your property while it's empty and make sure they do regular inspections

## Find out more...

You can find more information at:

[RSA – Vacant buildings and fly tipping](#)

[RISCAuthority – BDM10 Code of practice for the protection of empty buildings – Fire safety and security](#)

[RISCAuthority – S31 Unauthorised occupation of non-residential premises](#)

<sup>2</sup>Empty Buildings Deserves More Attention in the Housing Market - Business News Wales

# Escape of water

## Did you know...?

Water damage is one of the most common forms of insurance loss. The escape of water from burst pipes can have devastating effects, and often the damage caused to your premises can be as bad as if there had been a fire.



**In fact, leaking pipes cost the UK £2.6 million everyday.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Burst pipes and water leaks ABI

## Dos and don'ts

- Consider installing an alarm that automatically detects water leaks and shuts off valves on the incoming water supply.
  - Set the water-flow detection to shut off the water supply after about 15 minutes when property is occupied; less than a minute when empty
  - Link the leak detection (tapes) to the water-shut-off devices that are behind any water-based kitchen and utility room appliances
  - Set the detection devices to automatically send a signal or SMS to a keyholder who can respond quickly
  - Provide mains power supply and battery backup

There are lots of these alarms in the market and a broker should be able to help you find the best one for you

- Clear leaves and other debris from gutters and roof valleys regularly, especially in the autumn. You should have baskets fitted for removing debris from downpipes, which need to be both tall enough and kept clear
- Move higher value items and goods away from parts of the building where water from valley gutters might get in
- Consider providing overflow weirs (pipes or openings) at the end of valley gutters and at box gutters, or increasing the size of weirs, so that water overflows outside rather than into the building if drainage downpipes are backed-up or blocked
- Lag vulnerable pipes and consider keeping the heating at a frost-free setting
- Clear snow and ice from roof valleys in wintry conditions

## Plan ahead and follow up

- Make sure your tenants know where the water mains stop-cocks are, and make sure they can be reached easily so that the water supply can be isolated quickly in an emergency
- Regularly check that stop-cocks are working – fully close and reopen them at least once a year
- Make sure there are enough subsidiary isolating valves, especially for large tanks. Put labels on them to help people to identify and work them properly
- Keep the heating on, making sure the temperature doesn't fall below 5°C, to protect against the effects of frost during the winter months

## Find out more...

You can find more information at:

[RSA Insurance – Risk consulting](#)

# Storm damage

## Did you know...?

As our climate warms, we're experiencing stronger storms. Insurance companies paid out around...



**£150 million**  
in windstorm  
damage alone, just  
from storms Ciara  
and Dennis in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

So, all buildings need to be examined frequently and carefully. Those that are higher up, exposed to the prevailing winds, are particularly at risk. If you can't carry out the checks yourself, contact the Federation of Master Builders to get the advice of an approved contractor.

## Dos and don'ts

- Inspect the fabric of the building, paying particular attention to the roof – loose or damaged panels, tiles, slates or ridge tiles – at least once a year. Fix any problems straightaway
- Make sure flat roof coverings are in good condition, with no cracks or splits, and are firmly stuck down. Particularly at joints. Bitumen felt flat roof coverings may need to be renewed after 10 years
- Check and repair any brickwork pointing including chimneys, coping stones, lintels and ledges
- Make sure roof gutters, downpipes and drainage gullies are kept free from leaves and vegetation. Clean them at least once a year, possibly more often if there are trees nearby

## Plan ahead and follow up

- Draw up and put in place a pre-storm plan for inspecting, and removing or securing, yard storage – or anything else that could be susceptible to damage in high winds
- Develop and put in place a procedure to check for damages after a storm or high winds
- Appoint a qualified tree surgeon to inspect trees each year, and then follow any recommendations they make to prune or maintain them so that they don't become a hazard to your property in high winds

## Find out more...

You can find more information at:

[RSA Insurance – Risk consulting](#)

<sup>4</sup>UK Insurance Claims from Storms Ciara and Dennis Estimated at US\$473.7M (insurancejournal.com)

# Illegal activities

## ? Did you know...?

Tenants using your property for illegal activities – such as breeding animals, soliciting, storing drugs or stolen goods – is another key risk. Growing cannabis is becoming increasingly common.



**In fact, the UK's illicit cannabis market is worth about £2.5 billion a year,<sup>5</sup>**

...and a growing proportion of this is happening in rented residential properties.

A crop can be grown to harvest within 3 months and it comes with a variety of dangers, from explosions to structural damage. You might also get rot, mould or infestations because of moisture from irrigation systems.

Clear-up and repair costs in the aftermath of a cannabis farm can be considerable, quite apart from loss of rent.

<sup>5</sup> UK's illicit cannabis market worth £2.5bn a year, finds new report – Institute of Economic Affairs (iea.org.uk)

## Dos and don'ts

- Make sure you get formal identification for any prospective tenant and keep a record of it
- Keep on file an employer's reference (for everyone named on the tenancy agreement). Check it out to make sure it's genuine
- Keep a record of your tenant's bank account details and verify them by receiving at least one payment from that account
- Inspect the building inside and out at least every three months or as often as allowed under the tenancy agreement

## Plan ahead and follow up

- Schedule your inspections and keep a record of your visits
- Get to know the neighbours and ask them to report any suspicious activities at the property to you

## Find out more...

You can find more information at:

[Police Scotland – Cannabis cultivations – What should I know as a landlord?](#)

[Crimestoppers – A guide to keeping commercial cannabis out of your property](#)