



Protecting vacant commercial property



Guards versus Technology - which is best?

Outlining the strengths and limitations of manned guarding solutions compared with technological alternatives, and summarising current best practice in property protection.

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Section 1.

Introduction – VPS and the requirements for guarding

This white paper focuses on the requirements for commercial vacant property – comprising offices, industrial estates, warehousing, vacant retail units or converted specialist properties such as large estates or former care homes.

VPS' experience

This paper draws on the experience of managing over 90,000 properties, with nearly 100 service centres and offices locations across the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and the USA.

Clients comprise companies from real estate, property management, construction, property developers, insolvency practitioners, retail, food and leisure sectors. Many local authorities and councils are also clients, with social housing and residential units. VPS provide similar services too for many smaller companies and landlords.

Providing far more than security, our products and expert services allow our customers to protect their vacant properties against unauthorised access and property decay. We also clean, clear and remove hazards, and can disconnect services, carry out inspections and provide essential maintenance. By deterring trespassers, reducing crime and keeping vacant property in working order, our customers are better prepared for re-occupancy, sale or construction.

VPS' headquarters are based in Borehamwood, just outside London, and the VPS Group has been listed in the Sunday Times' 200 Fast Track companies for growth in international sales for two years running, 2012 and 2013. It is a member of the BSIA, and its accreditations include ISO 9001-2008 (BSI), ISO14001, SSAIB, OHAS and SSIP Safe Contractor.



Section 2.

The need for guarding and the potential scale of the protection required

Vacant properties require protection to prevent damage from:

Weather: flooding, storms, wind, lightning, snow, ice or excessive high temperatures

Utilities: water or gas pipe leaks, electrical faults, boiler leaks

Vandalism and intruders: theft, breakages, fires, graffiti, fly-tipping, fly posting

Squatting

Weather

2012 was the second wettest year in the UK national record dating back to 1910¹. Record breaking rainfall, floods and ‘supercell’ storms occurred for much of the year, from April through to July and again in September, November and December².

Aon Benfield gave an estimate of the total insurance losses through flooding for the year, which could reach £1.33 billion, with claims of £280 million from the flooding of 10–11 June, £498 million from 23–24 June floods and £50 million on 24–25 September³.

- April: A series of extra-tropical cyclones brought the wettest April to many parts of the UK. 50,000 homes were left without power in Northern England, as were 5,000 homes in Wales. Flood warnings were in force across much of the UK. Winds brought down trees in SW areas of the British Isles
- 22 June: in one day over a month’s worth of rain fell on areas of the North, with Lancashire, Cumbria and Pennine areas badly hit. Flash floods halted trains on the line between Leeds and Manchester Victoria, following a landslip and flooding

1. <http://metofficeneews.wordpress.com/2013/01/03/statistics-for-december-and-2012-is-the-uk-getting-wetter/>

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Great_Britain_and_Ireland_floods

3. http://thoughtleadership.aonbenfield.com/Documents/201212_if_monthly_cat_recap_november.pdf



“In 2010 there were £256m* of claims associated with water damage in properties, the winter months generating twice the volume of claims as the warmer months”.

*Association of British Insurers

Section 2.

- 28 June, supercell thunderstorms developed over Wales, then moved across England to the Midlands and the north leaving a trail of disruption in their wake. The Environment Agency had 10 flood warnings and 47 alerts in place for England, and another supercell storm struck Tyneside without warning at the height of the evening rush hour causing widespread damage and travel chaos. Flooded shopping malls were evacuated, Newcastle Central station was closed
- September, the Environment Agency reported 570 businesses and homes were flooded
- Late November saw the second wettest week in 50 years

Utilities – water or gas pipe leaks, electrical faults, boiler leaks

Water:

20% of property insurance claims are due to water leakages and burst pipes.

Leaks from a small burst or fractured pipe can release thousands of gallons of water if left unnoticed. The average insurance claim is an estimated £25,000 but costs can reach £100,000 or more for water damage to commercial properties.

Electrical faults in buildings other than homes:

- 60 fires a day occur in or beside vacant or derelict buildings. In 2011-12 there were 21,700 fires in empty or derelict properties⁴
- The main cause of accidental fires in buildings other than homes was faulty appliances and leads. This represented 24% of all such fires⁵

4. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/36467/FSGB_2011_to_12.pdf

5. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/36467/FSGB_2011_to_12.pdf



Section 2.

- The majority of fires occurred in:
 - retail distribution - 3,700 fires
 - industrial premises - 2,900 fires
 - restaurants, cafes, public houses etc - 2,500 fires
 - recreational and other cultural services - 1,500 fires.
 - private garages and sheds - 6,200 fires

In 2011-12, 25 people died in building fires other than homes, and 1,200 injuries were sustained in other building fires. 70 per cent of all fires in other buildings were started accidentally.

Vandalism – crime, break-ins, fires, graffiti, fly-tipping, fly posting

Crime and break-ins:

There were 209,000 recorded acts of vandalism against business premises in 2012. The majority of these were experienced by premises in the wholesale and retail sector, which is the largest of the four sectors covered by the Crimes against Businesses survey carried out by the Government⁶.

Metal Theft:

In 2012 over 1,000 metal thefts occurred each week from commercial properties in the UK, accounting for 1 in 6 of all thefts across all sectors. Unoccupied commercial premises are likely to bear the brunt of the estimated total £1 billion costs to repair the damage and replace stolen items from these crimes.

67,000 metal thefts have been experienced by commercial sectors in 2012.

Fires:

In the year 2011-2012:

- 30% of building fires were deliberate
- 85,600 refuse fires occurred (including bonfires and refuse containers)
- Automatic smoke alarms were not present in 50% (12,500) of all other building fires in 2011-12

6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-against-businesses-headline-findings-from-the-2012-commercial-victimisation-survey--2/crime-against-businesses-headline-findings-from-the-2012-commercial-victimisation-survey>



Section 2.

Fly-tipping:

- Every 40 seconds someone fly-tips in the UK
- Over a quarter of a million small van loads of rubbish are dumped each year
- In 2011-2012, over 744,000 incidents of fly-tipping were dealt with by local authorities⁷ in England and Wales, and 237,000 of these were for small van loads of rubbish. Councils spent over £50 million on clearance and enforcement costs

Squatting:

Estimates as to the number of squatters in the UK are fairly wide ranging, from 20,000 to 50,000⁸. There are anecdotal reports that since squatting in residential buildings became illegal in 2012, there has been a significant increase in enquiries to commercial property lawyers from landlords and owners of commercial premises.



7. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/FINAL-Official-Flytipping-Statistics-Notice-England-2011-12.pdf>

8. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/dec/03/squatters-criminalised-not-home-stealers>

Section 3.

Tackling the problem- the manned guard and technological solutions

Vacant Properties require special requirements:

A vacant property will often require additional elements of protection and security that occupied premises do not.

Whilst occupied premises also suffer from vandalism, deliberate fires and graffiti, vacant properties are more vulnerable to such attacks. Similarly, a water leak or flooding at an empty property inspected once a week, can cause far greater damage to the fabric and to the contents of a building than occupied premises or one with a continuous monitoring solution.

Depending on the type, location and context of the property, some vacant premises may need 24/7 continuous monitoring. This type of cover would need to protect not only from breaches of security during daylight and night-time hours, but also internal and external property care monitoring, ensuring there are no utility leaks or faults, flooding or other issues that could affect or damage the fabric of the building.

In addition, protection measures are often required for compliance to meet insurance policies. Premiums for vacant properties are usually substantially higher than for occupied premises, but the incorporation of measures recommended by a risk assessment from a vacant property specialist can often mitigate much of the additional insurance costs.

Manned guards:

The advantages:

Round the clock manned security services ensure there is a visual deterrent on-site with potentially little or no delays in responding to incidents. A traditional method many property and estate managers prefer to employ to secure a vacant property.

In summary, manned guards provide:

- A visual deterrent from crime, trespassing and vandalism events
- Incidents reported by a human will tend to be genuine and not false alarms
- An on-site response to water, gas or electricity faults
- General inspection and management services



Section 3.

- Real-time surveying of CCTV footage if applicable
- Alarm system surveillance
- Manned guards may hear a possible breach of security before they (or a CCTV system) sees it

The disadvantages:

- Substantial costs for 24/7 manned guarding, especially for long-term properties
- Guards are only able to be in one place at one time (a problem for larger sites)
- They are human: they may not stay alert for the entire shift some may fall asleep
- A high degree of trust is required for high-value sites
- Unless an audit system is in place, regular patrols may be missed

Technology solutions:

There are a number of technologies available now that aim to protect vacant properties from intruders, differentiate between genuine breaches and false alarms, secure and detect utility faults such as water leaks, and can provide police with evidence that can be used to prosecute intruders or vandals.

Alarms: Specially developed and adapted for vacant properties so that they can run wirelessly via power sources independent of the premises, where there may be no power available.

Camera systems: Able to film both during daylight and night time, high quality cameras can capture intruders on film.

Specialist utility locks: These prevent utility taps from being turned on without authority or through vandalism.

Water flow sensors: Sensors that fit over water pipes and can alert the monitoring station if water flow has begun unexpectedly.

The advantages:

The advantages of a comprehensive technological based security system is primarily one of reach and cost efficiency – there are many more ‘eyes’ possible maintaining 24/7 vigilance than with most manned guards solutions. In summary:

- Many alarm sensors can be fitted around a vacant property to provide a number of ‘eyes’ all at once
- Alarms are attentive, monitoring 24/7 (with alerts when battery power runs below a certain level)



Actual Verifeye Visual footage.

Section 3.

- Substantial cost savings over manned guards are possible (see case studies)
- Visual and audible (sirens and voice) warnings can deter intruders before a breach of security occurs
- Breaches can be captured on video in real time and monitoring stations can determine if such breaches are genuine or false before security staff or police are required
- Site management tool provided as electronic audits are kept when sensors are switched on or off
- Flooding, smoke, and unauthorised water flow resumption can all be monitored automatically
- Used in conjunction with regular site visits and inspections helps achieve the best of both worlds from technology and manned guards

The disadvantages:

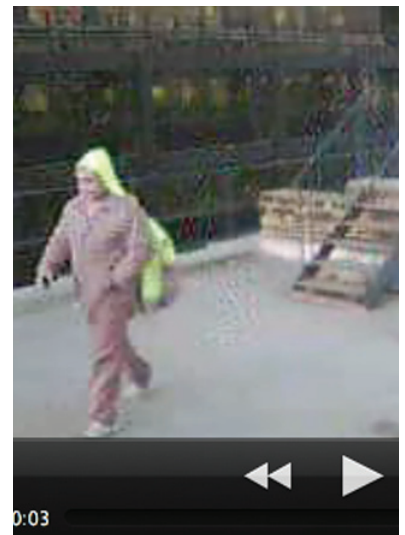
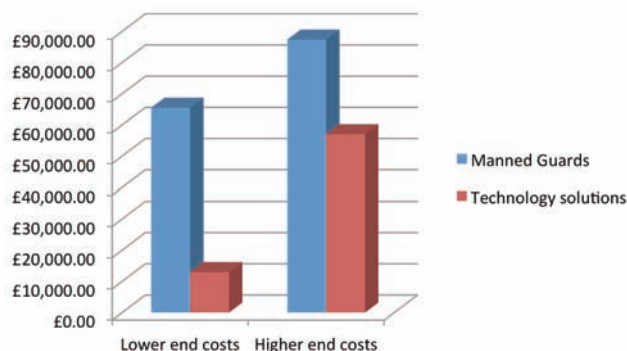
- If there is a security breach, it can take too long to send security staff or police to protect the property in time
- There may be less of a deterrent if no-one is on site
- False alarms may occur
- Some premises comprise risks that can be less easily managed by sensor systems

Manned Guards versus Technology: costs

Costs will vary widely depending on the context of each site but typical examples of the ranges are as follows:

24/7 single set of manned guards for a year: from £65,520 (at the lower end rate of £7.50 an hour) through to £87,360 (at a higher more typical end rate of £10 per hour).

24/7 technology costs for a year: from £4,000 through to £57,000 (for a large site, 32 sensors, daily external inspections) etc
– i.e. from £77 a week.



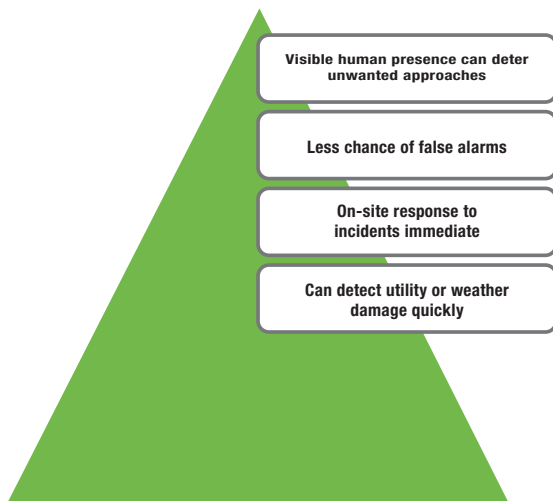
Actual Verifeye Visual footage.

Section 3.

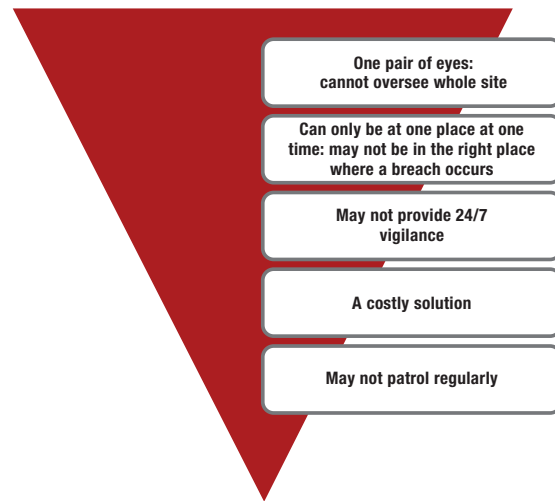
Strengths and Limitations of Manned Guards vs Technology:

Manned Guards:

Strengths

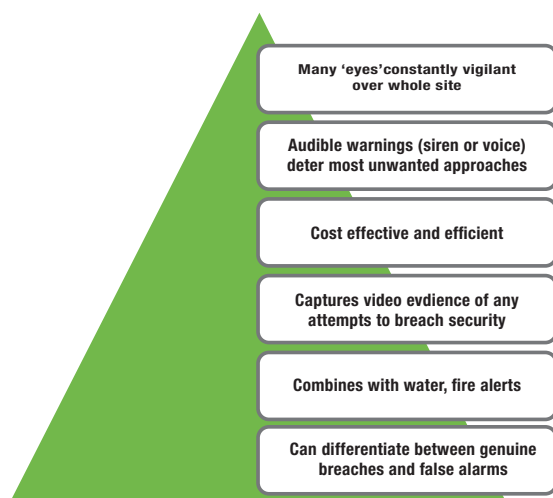


Limitations

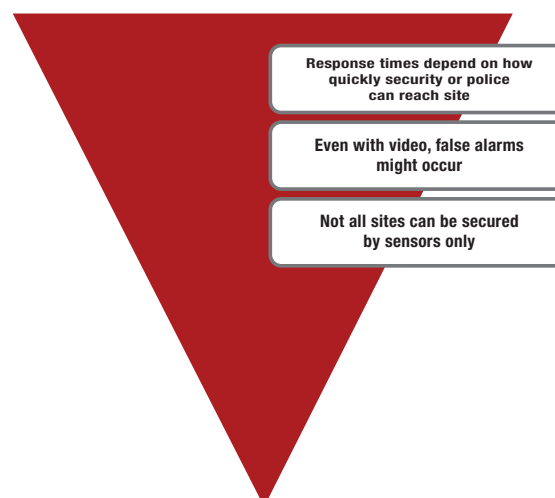


Technology Solutions:

Strengths



Limitations



Section 4.

Choosing the best fit-for-purpose solution

Determining which solution is the best for a particular property will be based on the specific requirements for that site, but an assessment by a professional vacant property specialist would be able to highlight the key requirements and the reasons why. Such an assessment will also draw in insurance compliance and public liability requirements if they apply.

Some sites will favour manned guards or technological alternatives, but many would ideally be protected by a mix of both solutions – gaining the benefits of both, in terms of effective security and alerts, cost savings and a human presence.

An example checklist for determining the best fit guarding solution:

How large is the property, internally, and the grounds surrounding it?

Is the property a high value site?

How secure are the perimeter boundaries?

How secure are the exits and entrances of the building?

How many ground floor windows are there?

Are there valuable metals, such as lead, visible or likely to be on the site?

Are there any outbuildings?

Is there a car park or bin area?

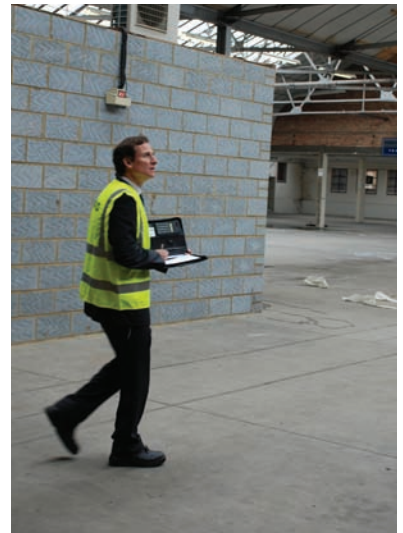
How close are there public footways or roads? Are they busy?

What is local crime rate data for the vacant property?

Is the vacant property high profile – e.g. a country manor, a former public house or former office landmark?

Is the property in an isolated location?

How accessible are the utility services on site?



Section 5.

Case Studies

1. Country Manor

Situated in 50 acres, this Manor House is a high value property with several outbuildings, a perimeter weak in places, and was being guarded 24/7 by five full time security guards.

By introducing a combined solution, using multiple SmartAlarm Gold units with Verifeye Visual sensors, a different rota for day and night-time on-site guards and audited patrols (via electronic identity keys), the number of staff required were reduced to two.

Protection and security of the property were increased, and with significant cost savings.

2. Warehouse/former film studio

When a TV series being filmed at the location ended, the property was vacant and suffered some theft of copper. A SmartAlarm Gold solution was introduced and over 30 sensors placed around the site. On one occasion, an intruder with a rifle was detected at the back of the property, filmed and after VPS' monitoring centre alerted the authorities; he was later questioned by police. The property was successfully let to another tenant last November.

3. Large Office unit

A former headquarters for a building society was being protected by three full time guards. Using a combination solution, VPS introduced a mix of SmartAlarms and sensors, security screens and new patrol schedules. The new vacant property protection programme reduced the number of guards required by two-thirds, down to one. The property has been successfully sold to a local authority for their head offices.



Section 6.

The next steps: assessment and support from VPS

VPS are the trusted specialists in securing, maintaining and managing vacant property across a wide range of customer and industry sectors the world over.

VPS, the Vacant Property Specialists are the global leaders in securing, maintaining and managing vacant property through the complete vacant property lifecycle. With locations across Europe and the United States, our customers rely on us to reduce the true costs of vacancy and help minimise the effects of vandalism on the surrounding communities.

By consistently delivering innovative and immediate solutions, VPS are able to reduce the costs associated with vacant property. We are available to clear, secure, monitor and maintain your property from the moment it becomes vacant. Our extensive range of solutions, including steel security, alarms with video verification and maintenance services provide customers with the peace of mind that their vacant property is safe, secure, and most importantly, retaining its value.

The first step: assessment

VPS provides a free risk assessment of your vacant property customised to your needs

VPS specialises in determining the risks associated with leaving a property empty. Our professionals will visit your sites and complete a thorough risk assessment free of charge. We will then recommend a customised solution that fits your requirements, budget and timeframe.



Section 6.

SmartAlarm Gold

Our advanced alarms are entirely stand-alone with a long-life battery and on-board tamper detection. They are usually installed in tandem with our sensors, both internal and external to your vacant property.

Customers with vacant property on their hands deserve the best in safety, security and peace of mind. The VPS SmartAlarm is fitted in minutes. Equipped with cordless sensors, they require no hard wiring, electricity, licensed radio systems or telephone lines.

They provide instant detection and alerts on a range of incidents including intruders and flooding. VPS alarms can also be paired with pressure mats and door sensors, providing our customers with the most advanced security solutions on the market.

To deter vandals, squatters and thieves, our vacant property alarms can include loudspeaker voice messages and a 120 decibel siren. This feature can also be turned off for covert monitoring if preferred, so as to cause minimum disruption or inconvenience to those in the vicinity of the property. Our alarms are encased in the same material used in riot shields and can withstand attack.

For simplicity and security, users of our systems are provided with a Personal Identification Device (PID) which contain an encrypted serial number and password. The keyholder simply touches the alarm with the PID to deactivate or reactivate it. If they forget, our alarms can be programmed to re-arm themselves.

Key benefits include:

- Fitted in minutes
- Equipped with cordless sensors
- Stand-alone with a long-life battery
- On-board tamper & flood detection
- Incorporates voice messaging
- Optional siren to deter intruders
- Encased in the same material used in riot shields
- Includes a Personal Identification Device (PID) for ease of use



Section 6.

Verifeye Visual

Is our most advanced camera sensor and designed to operate with our SmartAlarm Gold.

Together, they improve security both inside and outside a vacant property. On activation, Verifeye Visual will capture up to 20 seconds of clear, colour video clip, which is immediately relayed to our 24/7 monitoring station.

Key benefits include:

- Most advanced wireless sensor
- Operates with SmartAlarm Gold
- Photographic proof of all entrants to the premises
- Infrared LEDs capture images in low light
- Customisable light look-up table to respond more quickly to initial light settings
- Eliminates false triggers
- Weatherproofed with a rain hood for external use
- Built in tilt and tamper switches

VeriFlow - Advanced Water Sensor

Prevent damage from water leakage by alerting on water ingress or flooding associated with burst pipes and metal theft with our advanced water sensor.

VeriFlow is a battery operated and entirely wireless sensor which when used with our advanced SmartAlarm technology will alert on any unauthorised use of water within a property, as well as help detect any unexpected water flow such as from leaks or burst pipes.

Additionally the in-built noise/vibration sensor can detect any tampering or attack on the property pipe work, for example in the case of metal theft or vandalism. The sensor is designed to fit onto an internal pipe.

VeriFlow is a water flow and pipe attack sensor that constantly monitors the pipe work for unplanned water flow, vandalism or theft attack using a number of in-built sensors which it combines to create a unique view of the state of the internal water pipe.

Contact us for a free risk assessment or download the SmartAlarm Gold and Verifeye Visual brochures from our website www.vpspecialists.co.uk



Section 6.

The VeriFlow sensor has been designed to reduce the damage associated with water from pipes in vacant property, by alerting on them as soon as they occur. This cost effective solution monitors water flow without interfering with the existing plumbing or cutting into the existing pipe work.

Manned Guards

Whether you need around the clock guards, a caretaker, personal protection or advanced monitoring, VPS have the solution to meet your needs.

Investing in 'eyes and ears' on site is a tried, tested and proven security method. Our qualified and experienced security guards are on hand when and where you need them. They also act as your personal contact, keeping you constantly informed about the safety and security of your property.

Guarding

To meet current legislation, all the guards we use are SIA licensed. They are available on site at the time and frequency you require. Where there are multiple points of entry, you can combine our guard services with our advanced alarm systems. This effectively provides you with double the security without doubling the cost.

Personal protection

Whenever there is a threat to your staff or others, we can assign fully trained, professional and experienced guards to provide discreet personal protection.

Monitoring

We combine the security you need with the control you want. Our innovative system provides you with remote monitoring, recording, and reporting from anywhere. You can view real-time data about your secured property on our secure website at any time. This advanced system is quick and easy to use. Review our performance, view alarm alerts and actions taken, and analyse risk, breach and update reports direct from our guards.



Section 6.

Examples of other services

When a property is left vacant VPS offers immediate solutions to facilitate the drain down and service shutdown, and will reinstate when ready:

Water system drain down

Eliminate water damage, whether caused by a burst pipe, metal pipe theft, or act of ill will, by draining down all water systems. In addition, a system drain down removes the opportunity for the potentially fatal Legionella bacteria to grow in stagnant unused water reservoirs within the system. As added security, when the system is entirely devoid of water VPS installs its **PacLock** a - simple device which fits over the stopcock and is fastened with a padlock, preventing the water supply being turned back on by unauthorised personnel.

Utility turn off

Whilst at your property, and where feasible, VPS can also ensure all other services such as gas and electricity are turned off, reducing the risk of gas leaks and potential fire threats. In addition, we will take meter readings to ensure no discrepancy with previous tenants.

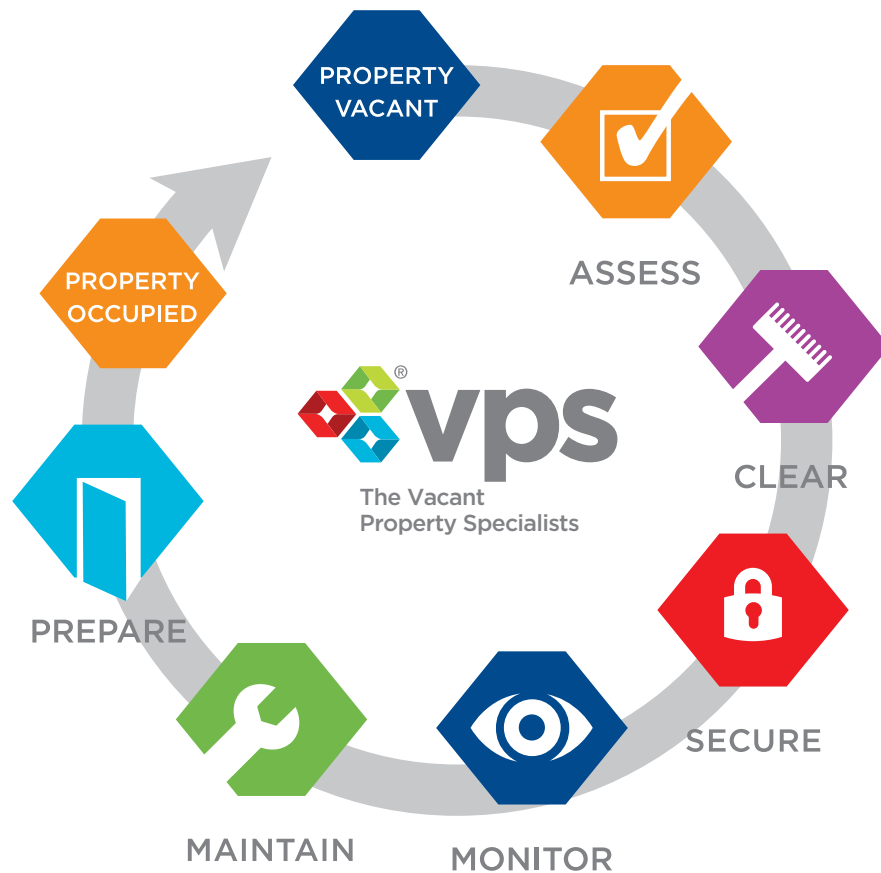
Reinstatement of services

When the services are required to be reinstated our multi-skilled experts are on hand to reinstate your system. If it is a water system, we will do this in accordance with ACOP L8 criteria. We can also organise the reinstatement of gas and electricity services.

Reducing the risk of Legionella

VPS understands the widespread damage a Legionella outbreak can cause. Negative PR can result in a loss of revenue, and where a fatality results, corporate manslaughter charges may be faced. VPS recommends that clients adhere to the ACOP L8 criteria (as enforced under the Health & Safety at Work Act) and chlorinate all systems on refilling to ensure that the system is clean and safe for consumption and use.





“VPS’ response to our instructions is quick and there is a well drilled procedure in place for installation, surveillance and removal. The security measures we take are important to ensure that we continue to be covered by our insurance provider.”

Estates Manager, Daniel Thwaites, plc

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