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we care about your security

## Picks and Tips From Mike-the-Locksmith



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### A Quote and a Message From Mike-the-Locksmith

**"If you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."** Toni Morrison

Dear Readers:

This month, I share with you, how to deter and prevent squatters from accessing your property.

Mike-the-Locksmith



## How to Deter and Prevent Squatters



Whether your property is a commercial or residential, as soon as it becomes unoccupied, it's at risk of trespass from squatters – those who enter and occupy properties without permission and who, once settled in, can be particularly difficult to remove.

### The Cost of Squatters

According to [Property and Building Directory](#), the costs of removing squatters and making good the property after illegal occupation can be significant whether the property is residential or commercial. Costs are most commonly incurred as a result of:

- **Property damage**, both when squatters gain access through breaking in and through damage caused by vandalism or from squatters stripping the property of valuable materials such as metals or fixtures, which they commonly sell on. If you're lucky, repairs required after evicting squatters may be limited to redecorating and cleaning, but realistically many property owners find themselves faced with expensive bills for full refurbishment.
- Squatters running up **bills** by accessing utilities which either haven't been turned off, or which they illegally reconnect.
- Needing to clear **trash**, fly-tipping and debris associated with squatters and anti-social behavior. This may include the high cost of specialist clearance, such as drug paraphernalia, or removal of asbestos which may have been exposed as squatters stripped out the property.
- **Insurance costs** increasing following claims after removing squatters.
- The **court and legal fees** payable as part of the eviction process.

Whether a property is residential or commercial, and whether it's likely to be unoccupied in the short or longer term, the sure way to prevent squatters is to actively deter them from entering the property in the first place. While turning off utilities is always useful, making the property much less appealing to squatters can be achieved through a few simple steps.

- **Keep the property looking occupied:** If you can get a trusted temporary tenant or reliable property guardian to make the property look occupied by actually living in it, then do so. If not, ensure that mail is redirected, to avoid that telltale pile on the doormat and decide whether to switch off utilities or use them to help you create the illusion of occupation (lights, radio on timers and motion-sensor lighting outside, etc.)
- **Make regular checks:** Stopping by regularly is always essential, whether you do it yourself or ask a trusted individual, such as a neighbor. Neighbors have a particular interest in ensuring that the property doesn't become an anti-social hub, so they are often more than willing to help.

- **Lock up securely:** Locks should be carefully checked and doubled up with deadlocks and padlocks for additional security. If the property is in between tenants, change the locks once the previous tenants leave, as you really don't know who else out there may have a key.
- **Maintain a tidy exterior:** Any outward signs of abandonment or neglect can add to the property's appeal to squatters, so keeping outside areas well maintained is essential. Gates should also be secured with padlocks, rather than with chains which could be cut away.

### Longer Term Protection

If the property's going to be vacant for a long-term, then utilities should always be switched off and the following steps considered.

- Access points should be **properly secured**. All access points, including doors, windows and skylights, should be secured as the custom-fit nature of steel screening means that no access point needs to remain vulnerable to squatters.
- Visible **alarms** should be fitted. Alarms can be fully functional and monitored with very little additional effort, through using the services of a professional company. They can also be wireless, so there's no problem with the utilities being turned off.
- **CCTV monitoring** offers both a visible deterrent and the benefit of immediate action in the event of problems. Monitored security increases the opportunity for prompt action in the event of trespass.
- Consider adding **barrier systems** to boundary areas, as well as having visible monitoring and alarms fitted outside. Temporary installation of concrete barriers, for example, can prevent entry by vehicles.

However, it's worth remembering that everything you do to deter and prevent squatters from accessing your property could prove to offer a significant saving compared to the costs you could be faced with if they succeed in getting in!

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