



# Utica National Risk Management Alert

## Key Items to Consider During School Closure Due to COVID-19 Outbreak

With the current public health emergency in the country related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, state and local governments have closed most schools across the country. During this period of uncertainty, it is important to have a plan in place to monitor your vacant school buildings during the extended closure.

First and foremost, daily building checks should still take place, and during your checks, here are some key items to keep in mind.



### DETER

Unoccupied school buildings are easy targets for trespassing, vandalism, burglary, and even arson. School officials should take steps to prevent unauthorized persons from gaining access to the property. There shouldn't be anyone on the property except your administrators or building supervisors inspecting the property, or emergency responders, if necessary.

If you can, bring your school vehicles inside, lock them in a gated area, or park them underneath your exterior security cameras.

We recommend that school playgrounds be closed. This will prevent people from congregating and not practicing adequate social distancing. Also, there's is the potential to spread COVID-19 from contact with the equipment. From a Risk Management and Liability standpoint, fencing off the playground would be ideal since it would physically prevent unauthorized use, but at the very least, there should be signage to indicate the playground is closed and not currently being inspected.

The facilities should remain locked and secured at all times, even when occupied.

### DETECT

It is very important to make sure all alarms are turned on and are working, including your central station intrusion alarms, water detection alarms, and any fire detection/suppression alarms.

Fire can spread quickly, and there may be a delay in reporting because the school building is unoccupied.

Make sure all areas of the building are regularly visited, including inspections of all classrooms, cafeteria, refrigerators, staff lounges, and any vegetation/greenhouses. All perishables and vegetation, including house plants, should be removed to reduce the amount of combustibles.

If you have analytics capability on your security camera system, now is the time to set it up. You can set up an invisible perimeter around your entrances or vehicles if you have this function. This can be done remotely with your camera vendor, assuming you have the technology.

A periodic check for rodents is necessary but easy to find. Check along the edges of the walls for distinct droppings that should be easily identified.

## DENY

Once you have allowed employees to gather their personal belongings, turn off non-essential personnel key fob access. Nobody that is deemed non-essential should be able to enter the building without proper authorization.

You should notify the local authorities, including the police and the fire department, that your school is closed and the property is unoccupied. They should be aware of how to access the building in case of an emergency. Provide keys or access codes and notify them about the location of the security system controls, water supply valves, and utility shutoffs.

Taking these measures will help keeping the building safe and secure.

## DOCUMENT

It is very important to keep a regular schedule for building cleaning and to document all aspects of your cleaning activities.

Review and keep documentation on all key fob systems.

Schools should consider normal contractual services – trash pickup, walk-off mats, food deliveries – and if they will continue to be needed and document all of the decisions. Also, if your school is not providing meals, review your food service orders – and remember to document!

## ENERGY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (EMS)

With the building unoccupied, you may want to lower the heating systems to the low/mid-60s. Some systems have the capability of adjusting the hot water system as well. Sewer drains, as well as gaskets and seals, can dry up quickly from inactivity therefore plumbing fixtures should continue to be run during the building check.

Exhaust ventilation should be maintained to some extent, especially if your building has drywall, in order to reduce the potential for mold. Anything that is plugged in and not critical to operations should be unplugged.

If you have a pool, you should keep it at a minimum temperature 24/7 while not being used. Pools that are not regularly maintained and monitored should be drained.

**For additional information, please contact your Educational Institutions Risk Management Specialist Mike Centrone at [michael.centrone@uticanational.com](mailto:michael.centrone@uticanational.com).**

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