# Short and Long-term Closures

As Covid-19 restrictions linger, businesses may find themselves extending building closures or newly closing. Some may only be closing portions of their facilities due to reduced capacity. In either case, there are a few items to consider when deciding to close an entire facility or portions of it.

## Preventative maintenance in colder climates

In cold weather environments, most freeze-ups occur in buildings closed for extended periods of time. These can be costly and time consuming to fix. Deteriorating insulation, roof leaks, and electrical malfunctions can also go unnoticed. While it may seem like a good idea to save costs through reduced energy usage, one should also weigh the cost to repair if something were to happen.

**To prevent freezing:**
1. Keep thermostats set at 55 °F or higher, ideally at 65 °F.
2. Make sure heaters and vents are cleaned and maintained to allow for proper air circulation.
3. Ensure all doors, windows, and other openings are properly secured, and all pipes and walls are adequately insulated.

If your building is sprinkler protected, make sure those areas remain heated. It may be easy to forget a portion of your building contains plumbing. Emerging technology makes it easy to monitor your building via a wireless application.

4. Consider installing smart sensors which can detect large swings in temperature, moisture buildup, or unauthorized access.
5. If possible, assign someone to inspect the building periodically for potential problems.

In addition to a proper interior maintenance routine, business owners should keep up with exterior grooming. Excessive snow buildup on the roof is problematic and could lead to collapse or other structural damage. Also, continue to clear pathways available to the public to reduce the slip and fall hazard.

## Legionnaires' Disease

Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia caused by *Legionella* bacteria. *Legionella* can easily proliferate in water systems such as sink faucets, showerheads, water fountains, hot water tanks, and other plumbing systems. This occurs when plumbing systems aren't properly maintained and the water remains stagnant between 68°-122°F. The bacteria can grow on algae, scale, and other sediment in the line. As *Legionella* remains viable in the system, it can spread to humans via contaminated aerosols.

**Control measures should be in place to avoid the development and spread of Legionnaires' Disease:**
1. Continuously measure water quality to ensure no changes have occurred that could lead to *Legionella* growth (e.g., low chlorine levels).
2. Water heaters should be maintained at appropriate temperatures.
3. Any decorative water devices should be cleaned and free of any visible biofilm.
4. Clean all surfaces with any visible biofilm.

**Additionally, if your building is closed or partially closed:**
4. Assign someone to counteract stagnation with daily flushing of sinks and other fixtures with both hot and cold water. If possible, document the task and other relevant duties.

## Maintaining your HVAC system

Although you may be closed or at reduced capacity, maintenance of integral equipment is still necessary. In fact, this may even be a good time to have your local contractor perform any necessary repairs or make upgrades. If you're concerned about Covid-19, consider enhancing your filtration system.

If you've chosen to completely shut off your system for an extended period, at a minimum, keep the condensate drain traps filled to avoid air quality issues upon startup. Upon startup, be sure to have the filters changed and closely monitor the system for any issues. Restarting the system after a long period of dormancy can be stressful and may lead to equipment failure. If possible, restart your system a week before reopening in case any problems occur.

It's not recommended to shut off a building's HVAC system. Instead, run the system in the Unoccupied Mode to maintain a reasonable temperature and relative humidity. If your system doesn't have a similar automated setting, you may have to directly monitor the temperature. To maintain cooling, the system should have a setpoint of 80°F and less than 60% RH. For heating, a 65°F setpoint and minimum 40% RH.

## Securing your building

Keeping your building secure during times of vacancy is not only important for maintaining the integrity of your business, it can also help you identify and/or prevent any problems that arise during your absence.

**To properly secure your building:**
1. Install, or continue to service your existing alarm system. If you're operating in only portions of your building, consider installing smart alarms that can detect and notify you if certain areas have been breached.
2. Keep entryways and other important areas well lit to help deter unauthorized access. Motion-activated lights are a great option.
3. Install security cameras, preferably with a wireless viewing application. Security cameras can help in several ways. They can act as a deterrent for would-be criminals, maintain a record of special events, and help you monitor in real-time.

It's also helpful to alert others to the potential vacancy. Keep your staff informed, alert your building owner if you're a tenant, and consider notifying your local fire and police departments.

Continue to  maintain the property and, if possible, assign someone to physically check on the property and/or "make the rounds" in the vacant areas.

## When it's time to reopen

✓ If applicable, notify your insurance provider of your intent to reopen and if any major changes occurred.

✓ Inspect the area to be reopened to ensure everything is in order. Again, alert your insurance provider if any damages or other relevant information is discovered.

✓ Clean and sanitize your facility as recommended by the CDC and/or as directed by your local municipality. Make sure to use the appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) and always follow directions as provided by the SDS (safety data sheet).

✓ Ensure that you're following all newly-established rules and regulations as directed by your local municipality. This could include, but is not limited to, new signage, proximity controlling devices/barriers, appropriate amount, types of PPE, etc.

✓ Have a plan in place to facilitate a smooth reopening process and to prepare for any incidents that may occur.

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