

SECURING THE CHAPTER HOUSE FOR SUMMER VACATION

Is Your Chapter House Secured?

Now is the time to start preparing to secure the chapter house for the upcoming summer. The summer months present an ideal opportunity to make housing improvements. However, during this time when the house may have few or no occupants, the property can also be unnecessarily vulnerable to damage and theft if the proper steps are not taken to secure it.

The following information is helpful regardless of the size or type of chapter house. Unless a caretaker with specific duties (e.g., yard care, minor maintenance and repair, mail collection, etc.) occupies the property, it is recommended that all houses be closed during the summer break. It is rarely beneficial to keep the house open during this time.

The decision to remain open should be a financial one: there should be enough residents to at least break even. However, even with breakeven occupancy, the house still suffers from continued wear and tear. With fewer residents, it is more difficult to keep up with cleaning and other maintenance needs, especially if there is not an on-site manager. Also, with a small number of tenants, the house could be more prone to theft and vandalism than it would be if it were completely locked and secured.

To prepare for a break or vacation when few or no people will be around, several things should be done to reduce costs, prevent serious damage and improve security and safety. Breaks are also good times to conduct maintenance and improvement projects. Consider the following check list as it applies to your situation.

Administrative and General Items

- **Room Check Out** - Each tenant should be held responsible for the condition of his room. As each person moves out, a checklist should be used for a thorough inspection of his room. All damages and abnormal maintenance needs should be documented so the tenant's security deposit can be handled properly, and any repairs can be addressed before members return for the next term.
- **Collect Keys** - Keys are often handed out throughout the year for various reasons (e.g., storage closets, rooms, kitchen, cabinets, files, main door, etc.). Buying new locks, making duplicate keys, and using a locksmith can be costly. It's best to keep track of those members who receive keys during the year, and those who don't return their key should be charged appropriately.
- **Room Leases Signed** - A written agreement should exist for each person living in the house. It's best to have the leases signed for the coming term before members depart for vacation. Ideally, a security deposit is collected ahead of time as well.
- **House Corporation and Chapter Operating Agreement** - A written agreement should exist between the house corporation and chapter and should be signed ahead of time. This agreement should cover all expectations of each party; this helps both the chapter and the house corporation avoid misunderstandings and plan more accurately. Sample agreements are available from the International Fraternity.
- **Announce Summer Projects** - Summer is the best time to conduct housing projects. If a project is going to require the assistance of the chapter members, it is best to announce it before they leave for vacation. Announcements should be both verbal and written, so no one can claim that he didn't know about the project(s).
- **Summer House Manager** - The chapter or house corporation should appoint a summer manager who will make sure the house is checked, inside and out, on a weekly basis. He could also be in charge of overseeing all of the summer maintenance needs. If a caretaker is employed who is not a member, the summer house manager could be responsible for keeping the caretaker accountable.

- Meet With The House Corporation - A year-end meeting between the chapter officers, the house manager, the kitchen steward and the house corporation would be helpful for evaluating the financial situation and any necessary projects for the break.
- Year-End Financial Reports - Both the chapter and the house corporation are required to send their year-end financial reports to the International Fraternity. This is a constitutional requirement. Most chapters' fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30. The chapter reports must be audited and are due by August 1. The house corporation reports are due by September 1.
- Budget Planning - The budget is the financial game plan used to achieve the chapter's goals. Both the chapter and the house corporation should plan their next school term's budget ahead of time. This should be done in conjunction with the review of old goals and the creation of new ones. To make this planning session complete, a calendar should be created to accompany the goals and budget. With these three items, the game plan is complete.
- Safety Report - A safety report should be made periodically, and the end of a school term is one of the best times to do so. A written report should be made and given to the house owner or the house corporation with a copy given to the chapter advisor.
- House Corporation Recruitment - If your house corporation is open to general membership, the graduating seniors should be solicited to join the corporation before the school year ends.
- Mail Delivery - If mail is received at the house, the post office must be notified of a summer forwarding address. If mail is received at a post office box, someone should be assigned to check the box regularly. The International Fraternity must be notified with the name and address of the chapter's summer correspondent.
- Fire Department, Police and Alarm Company Notification - Be sure to notify the fire department, the police, and your alarm company whether your house will be open or closed, and make sure they know the person to contact in the event of an emergency. If the police and alarm company know your property will be closed, they will watch it more closely.
- Notify Neighbors - Let the neighbors know whether or not your house will be vacant. If a small number of tenants will occupy the house, it would be good for them to introduce themselves to the neighbors.
- Garbage Pick-Up - Garbage is usually picked up on a weekly basis. If the chapter pays for this service and the need for it is decreased, some money may be saved by lowering the number of pick-ups or halting them altogether.
- Telephone Service - If there's a public phone in the chapter house, check into the cost saving possibilities if the phone will not be needed during the summer.
- Exterminating - When the house is vacant, it's the best time for an extermination company to do a major insect and rodent extermination project.
- Thorough Cleaning - The entire house should be cleaned, inside and out, during vacation.
- Secure Windows - All windows should be locked. A security bar could be placed in the runner of each ground floor window. For theft prevention and energy conservation, the drapes and blinds should be closed.
- Timers On Lights - Exterior lights help deter trespassers. Automatic timers are convenient and will ensure that the lights are on when desired.
- Supply Inventory - Check the inventory of cleaning and general supplies (e.g., toilet paper, light bulbs, etc.). This will be important knowledge for budgeting purposes.
- Fire Extinguishers, Safety and Alarm Systems - The fire extinguishers and other smoke and fire safety systems should be checked and serviced routinely. It is an especially good time to test all of the safety systems when the building is empty. If the house has a centralized alarm system, alert the alarm company of the vacancy dates.
- Lower Water Heater Thermostat - Considerable amounts of energy and money can be saved by turning down the hot water heater thermostat. Larger buildings often have more than one water heater.

- Check and Service Mechanical Systems - Have a qualified individual check and service the air conditioner, furnace, boiler, and water heater.
- Change Combination Locks - The code to combination locks should be changed periodically. The end of a school term is one of the best times to do so. Even chapter members shouldn't be unexpectedly and irregularly entering the building during vacation time.
- Secure Expensive Items - If a specific storage closet is unavailable, one room should be designated for locking up all target items for burglars, such as stereos, TVs, VCRs, speakers, paintings, etc.
- Protection Against Vandalism - Sometimes people break into a building simply for the sake of destruction. Composites, trophies, and chapter knick-knacks are often the target of such vandalism, and some of these items are irreplaceable. Make sure these types of memorabilia are safely locked up and out of sight.
- All Appliances Unplugged and Individual Rooms Emptied - It's best to have individual rooms entirely emptied, which includes the unplugging and removal of all appliances in the chapter house. This makes the building less tempting for burglars, and it clears the rooms for summer maintenance projects such as painting with paint sprayers, resurfacing the floors, etc. It also makes spotting damages and making the appropriate deductions from security deposits easier and allows more flexibility in adjusting room assignments.

Bathrooms

- Check and Service Plumbing Fixtures - The end of the school year is a good time to inspect the plumbing fixtures for leaks and mechanical deficiencies. Water may be turned off to areas of the house that will not need it.
- Moisture-Tight Surfaces - After a thorough cleaning, it's good to check the tile and other wall and floor coverings to make sure that water isn't seeping through to the under structure. If regrouting the tile is necessary, an extended school break is the best time to do it.

Exterior and Yard

- Yard Maintenance - Be sure that arrangements are made so that grass, shrubs, and trees are watered and maintained. The appearance of the house and yard says a lot about the people who live there. Maintain a positive image by keeping a sharp-looking yard. It's also important to keep the house looking its best for recruitment at the start of the next term.
- Limit Any Attractive Nuisance - An attractive nuisance is a dangerous condition which has the propensity to lure children. A swimming pool is a good example. Even a "No Trespassing" sign or a locked gate are not sufficient protection for the chapter if a child is injured on chapter property. Swimming pools should be drained. Try to limit the lure of any potential attractive nuisance, especially if few or no members will be in residence during the vacation.
- Secure Outdoor Valuables - Lock up those items that could be easily stolen, such as yard tools, patio furniture, etc.
- Check Water Drainage - Make sure the gutters and downspouts are clear of debris and in working order so that water will run from the roof properly and drain away from the building. Also check to make sure there are no low spots on the ground where water could collect next to the building.

Kitchen and Dining Facilities

- Remove Perishable Food - Remove all perishable food from the refrigerator(s) and shelves. Tightly seal any open containers of food that can be stored. The odor of open and spoiling food will attract rodents and insects.
- Kitchen Cleaning - It is very important that all appliances, equipment, floors, insides of cupboards, and refrigerator(s), etc. be thoroughly cleaned. Grease, dried spills, and crumbs will also attract vermin.

The above is intended to provide the chapter with general information and suggestions for improvement. It is not a directive and is not intended to direct the chapter in any manner. A chapter is not required to use or implement this information or suggestions. The decision on whether or how to use this information is solely that of the chapter.

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- Take Inventory of Supplies - If the cook has not already done so, inventory all food, kitchen, and table service hardware, utensils, and cleaning supplies for the kitchen and dining room. This will be important for budgeting purposes.
- Service Equipment - All kitchen equipment should be routinely serviced, and during a break is an optimum time to do so. Call a qualified service person to inspect the refrigerator(s), cooler, dishwasher, etc.
- Shut Off Equipment - Turn off the gas and water lines and unplug all unneeded equipment and appliances. Drain the water from any equipment that has a reservoir or waterlines within it.
- Lock Up Supplies - All kitchen and table service hardware, utensils, cleaning supplies and storable food should be locked away. Preparing the house properly and taking advantage of the time vacation provides will give both the chapter and the house corporation that head start and extra motivation to make the coming school term even more successful than the last.