

Vacant/Empty Buildings and F.L.E.A. Cover - What I need to know

Landlord insurance can be a veritable minefield, with pits and trap-falls lurking around every corner. The aim of any landlord is to keep costs down, your insurance valid and your property covered. It goes without saying, then, that keeping on top of the various intricate complexities that are frequently dotted around a policy is of vital importance. You may think you have got it all covered, but when circumstances change, so does your cover.

One occurrence for which this needs to be kept in mind is when the building is empty. Of course, your immediate priority is likely to be getting new tenants in place, or carrying out repairs and modifications, but it's also crucial that you consider the ramifications and implications a vacant property may have on your insurance cover.

Insurers take the view that a vacant or empty property poses a higher risk than one with residents. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, and obviously, in an occupied building there is nobody around to either deal with, or raise awareness of, a problem as soon as it arises. A burst pipe, for example, can be left to commit untold damage before it is discovered.

Secondly, a vacant house is more susceptible to break ins, vandalism and other damage as there are no occupants present to either ward them off or send for help.

So, first things first, tell your insurer immediately. Not tomorrow, not next week, even if you have an inkling that new occupants will soon be in place, you need to tell them immediately.

Once they're in the picture, you may be able to alter your policy to one for an unoccupied property. This is a short-term solution as unoccupied property insurance typically provides cover for a limited period of 30 days.

In order to be successful in your request, you will need to demonstrate that the property is suitably secure. Unoccupied properties are much more at risk from vandalism and arson so make sure you have strong locks, a good alarm and shutters etc still in place. Property owners' liability should also be included in case someone is injured on the property or, for example, as a result of something falling from the roof.

It's also fairly likely that you'll be asked to make regular inspections of the property. While this may well be a condition of your cover, it is also simply good practice. Of course, the more visits you make, the better, but a minimum of one inspection a week is advisable.

Another avenue well worth exploring is taking out a F.L.E.A. cover insurance policy. Unfortunately, despite the name, this does not include any elements of pest control or fumigation. No, what it actually stands for is Fire, Lightning, Earthquake and Aircraft.

Essentially, what it is is a bog standard, basic form of unoccupied property insurance. Now, you'd think that, given the name, a F.L.E.A. policy would therefore ensure you were protected from a twisted fire-starter, lightning striking up to and over twice, tremors from the ground and an air traffic accident. Sadly, you'd be wrong.

Most F.L.E.A. policies vary according to the insurers. Some, for example, don't actually include cover for damage by aircraft while others will also include protection for damage as a result of an explosion. Therefore, despite its superficially simple appearance, it's

important to take the time to research and choose your F.L.E.A policy as there is no such thing as a standard template within the industry.

It's well worth taking the time and researching thoroughly to ensure you obtain exactly what you need.