

The Problem of Abandoned Properties: Nuisance, Crimes, Depressed property values

The housing and bank crisis of 2008 brought with it many properties in Sacramento that have been abandoned. Property owners walk away even before the foreclosure is done. Homes are abandoned with no one maintaining them. Even after the foreclosure, often times, the property remains vacant, with the bank not maintaining the property.

Criminals discover these properties by checking the lists of foreclosed property or seeing an unkempt home and targeting them for theft or trespass. Word of the vacant property spreads. Squatters take residence, and nuisance activities and crime arrive.

Who is Responsible?

The property owner is responsible. Many times the owner who abandoned the property on threat of foreclosure is still responsible but doesn't know or doesn't care. Many times the bank becomes the owner but fail to properly manage the property. Many banks claim a servicer of the property is responsible.

The neighbors of the abandoned property usually are the ones who take responsibility of the problem because they are impacted the most by it.

The Laws on Nuisance Properties

Owners are legally required to maintain their property to the standards set forth in the Sacramento County Code as well as other provisions of federal, state, and local law which further the protection of life, limb, health, property, safety and welfare of the general public and occupants of residential buildings.

Violations of the California Penal Code and Health & Safety Code on Public Nuisance and Housing, as well as Sacramento County Code on Nuisance, Building and Zoning violations are **Misdemeanor crimes**. This means the owner can be sentenced up to 6 months of county jail, fined up to \$10,000 and placed on probation, whether they are a corporate bank owner or private individual.

Civil and Administrative Penalties

In addition to criminal penalties, the owner can be liable for a civil penalty up to \$25,000. Administrative penalties may also be imposed. The County may take action to abate the nuisance and assess the cost of the abatement against the property owner and/or the property as a lien.

How to Take Action Against These Nuisance Properties

1. Prevent Crime and Depressed Values by taking care of the abandoned property to give the appearance to criminals that the home is inhabited.
2. Work together with your partners, Code Enforcement, Sheriff, District Attorney, and your neighbors.
3. Information from neighbors is evidence that can be used in nuisance actions taken by law enforcement, neighborhoods and the District Attorney.
4. Neighborhood groups can sue on their own by taking the property owner to Small Claims Court with awards up to \$10,000 per family member.
5. Law enforcement informally works with the owner by trying to get compliance from notice and orders.
6. The District Attorney, with evidence from neighbors and law enforcement, can file criminal and civil charges.

Force the owner to take responsibility by taking action to protect your rights!

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO MAINTAIN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD PROPERTY VALUES

- ❖ Work with your neighbors to monitor the abandoned property:
 - Pick up trash/litter
 - Mow and water the yard
 - Pick up flyers/newspapers and notify the mailman
 - Park a car in the driveway and move it occasionally
 - Pull the trash cans to and from the curb and put some of your trash in the cans.
- ❖ Call 911 to report crime occurring on the property such as trespass, vandalism, suspicious people.
- ❖ Report to the Sheriff non-emergency number 874-5115 any crimes that have occurred.
- ❖ Call Code Enforcement to advise of any code violations of which you become aware, including dilapidation, decay, damage, trash, debris, etc.
- ❖ Develop a Neighborhood Watch.
We can help by working together.

Important Contacts:

Code Enforcement/ Sacramento County Community Hazards & Nuisance Complaint Intake Center for information regarding nuisance properties, illegal dumping, junk and rubbish, substandard housing: **Dial 3-1-1**

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Sacramento Sheriff's Department for information regarding Neighborhood and Business Watch at **874-5717**

Sacramento Sheriff's Department for crimes:
Non-emergency **874-5115**
Emergency **Dial 9-1-1**

Abandoned Properties: What You Should Know



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Sacramento County
District Attorney's Office
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in Cooperation and Partnership with
Sacramento County Sheriff's Department
Sacramento County Code Enforcement

