



# ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

## Safety and Loss Control News

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Prepared by Gallagher Bassett Services, Inc.

## Conducting Parish Facility Self-Inspections

Regular, documented parish inspections go a long way to preventing both major and minor facility damage. In addition to a daily, cursory examination, a general inspection of the inside and outside of the facility should be conducted at least monthly and documented. Further, to complete the process, an annual inspection by qualified experts should be conducted. If leaders and members would take the time to specifically look for obvious hazards and areas of concern, much larger damage could be prevented. Here are those areas that should be a part of every inspection.

### OUTSIDE

**Roof inspection:** Inspect flat roofs of buildings as well as gutters, downspouts and flashing in the late fall and early spring of each year, or as needed, in order to lower the possibility of water damage. For roofs that are pitched, consider having an outside roofing contractor periodically complete this same task. Water damage from faulty roofs, blocked gutters or downspouts and flashing which has pulled away from the building is one of the largest areas of losses to parishes and should be proactively addressed. In addition, roof drains on flat roofs should be routinely cleaned of leaves and other debris. Standing water on flat roofs eventually leads to roof leaks.

**Gutters and downspouts:** While inspecting the roof, check for clogged gutters and downspouts. Make sure they are cleaned out, especially during seasons where leaves and twigs are more likely to clog them. Also check the downspouts and drains on the ground, making sure they are flowing correctly, aimed in the proper direction for safe water flow and not crushed or bent in an incorrect fashion.

**Drainage:** Look at the property, especially during a rainstorm. Determine if water is flowing toward or away from buildings. Any water moving toward the building is a problem.

**Walls and chimneys:** Take a close look at exterior walls and chimneys. Look for loose bricks, cracked or missing mortar and rotten wood. Also stand at different angles and see if the walls are bowing.

**Walking surfaces:** Walk the parking lots, sidewalks and stairs. Look for cracks, holes, chips and deterioration.

**Doors and windows:** Look around doors and windows for cracked or missing glass, deteriorating frames, or windows and doors that are no longer able to be secured.

**Trees and electrical service:** Also look around the grounds for trees and branches that are dead. Not only do they pose an injury hazard but also an electrical hazard if they are close to power lines. Do a cursory look at the electrical service into the building. Often it can become exposed or even be a roost for birds.

### INSIDE

**Entrances:** The first interior inspection should be at the facility entrances. These areas should be free from hazards and obstructions. Look also at floor surfaces and lighting.

**Hallways and stairwells:** All hallways and stairwells should be free of obstructions. Even lesser-used hallways should be clear, as they may be used for an emergency evacuation route. Make sure the steps and railings are safe and secure and that there is adequate lighting.

**Doors and windows:** Once again, this time from the inside, look for cracked and deteriorating windows and doors. Look for any signs of water entering through them. Make sure they can be secured, especially those at ground level. Also, make sure exit



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doors are marked and are not chained or locked to prevent proper exit.

**Storage areas:** Few parishes have more storage space than they need. Further, many people in parishes are reluctant to throw anything out. As a result, designated storage areas get cluttered, and other locations are used for storage. This will often pose a fire hazard. Inspections should also look at hazards such as flammable objects coming in contact with a heat or electrical source.

**Furnace room:** The furnace room is often one of those “extra” storage areas. Ideally, nothing should be stored anywhere near the furnace. To help with this, yellow tape should be placed on the floor around the furnace with instructions that nothing be placed inside the yellow tape. Also, by looking for corrosion on the fittings, leakage, and knowing what the pressure setting should be, will help prevent unexpected leaks or damage.

**Plumbing:** The plumbing throughout the facility should be checked. Each restroom water source (kitchens, nursery area, etc.) should be viewed to determine if there are any leaks. A small leak found and repaired early can prevent a more serious problem.

**Electrical:** All electrical outlets should be inspected. Look, not only for obvious damage, but also determine if too many items are plugged into an outlet. Use (but not overuse) of power strips or surge protection devices is advised.

Open all electrical panels in the facility. Look for obvious damage as well as any switches that have been taped open or rigged so they can't be shut off. If a switch is forced to be permanently on, the source of the electrical surge should be determined and corrected.

**Flammables:** Finally, all flammables (e.g., cleaning supplies, paint, paint remover, etc.) should be placed in a marked, metal cabinet away from heat sources. Proper ventilation is necessary to prevent heat or fume buildup. Make sure someone is responsible for proper elimination of old supplies.

### Conclusion

As mentioned previously, these intentional walk-around inspections should be conducted on a scheduled basis. Any documented concerns should be followed up with corrective action and date completed.

Leave the technical inspections to the experts. Annual inspections that include HVAC, electrical and building contractors, will be money well spent. A combination of daily, monthly and annual inspections, done by the right people, can go a long way toward the prevention of floods, fires, and serious damage.

## Closing Your Rectory or Convent — Checklist for Buildings Not in Use



A rectory or convent that is not properly cared for while occupants are not living in the facility can lead to costly claims. A few precautions when leaving the home unoccupied can help assure damage will not occur. *Note: This article is specific for cold-weather areas. Homes located where there is no threat of freezing plumbing will not need to have water drained from systems; however, for these homes, everything else mentioned in this article applies.*

Unless you plan to heat your rectory or convent and have someone check on it regularly, it's best to take precautions to protect the parish property. There are a number of things that can happen during your absence that can cause great damage.

The enemies of your rectory or convent are the same as the enemies of any type of dwelling. A small drip in the wrong place can soak into walls, floors or foundations causing degradation. An unsealed gap in the wall, roof or foundation can invite unwanted guests. Deferred maintenance can reach emergency status while you are not there.

The number one agent of damage to the home is uncontrolled water. The roof is the first line of defense against outside water penetration. Make sure the roof is in good condition and that the gutters are clean. Be certain that the water shed from the roof drains away from the foundation.

Check caulking around windows and weather stripping around the outside doors. Gaps in these places can allow the entry of mice. Keep in mind that mice can squeeze through holes only 1/4" in diameter. In addition, rats can make it through 1/2" gaps.

Walk around the home. Look for places where pipes, wires and vents go through the wall or roof. If you notice small gaps around these penetrations, seal them. If all entry points for insects and rodents are sealed, it is less likely these guests will enter the home. Check at the local hardware or building supply

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store for the proper sealing material.

All vents and open drains must be covered with wire mesh or air-operated flaps. Vents with flaps can be covered with mesh as long as it doesn't interfere with the operation of the flaps. Screens should never be used to cover dryer vents. Screens used to cover dryer vents create a fire hazard.

Make sure there is no place where dirt is piled against the foundation closer than 6" from the siding. This gap helps keep insects from gaining access to the wood in the sill plates, framing and siding.

Trees or other plants that come into contact with all sides of the home or roof provide access for rodents such as squirrels and insects. If trees hang over the roof, gutters can fill with pine needles or leaves. A blocked gutter can cause major damage. The branches also pose a danger to the roof itself if blown or broken by a storm. In addition, rotting needles and leaves hold moisture that promotes insect growth and decay of some roofing materials. Clear off any buildup of these materials on roof or in gutters.

If the building has a chimney or stove pipe, make certain that spark arrestors cover the top. A spark arrestor will also keep animals out of these areas.

When leaving the home for extended periods of time, it is best to evacuate all water from the plumbing system. Burst pipes can be a nightmare due to the damage they cause, not to mention the repair cost. The first step is to turn off the main water valve. If you have a pump, turn off the power. Drain the pressure tank if applicable. Connect a hose to the drain cock and run the hose outdoors away from the foundation. Then open the drain.

The pressure tank accumulates water and builds pressure to distribute water throughout the home. However, if you don't have a pump, you probably don't have a pressure tank.

Open all faucets to allow water to drain. Water left in pipes can freeze and burst. A frozen pipe may not leak until a spring thaw or may choose an illogical time to burst, spewing water everywhere. It's unpredictable as to the amount of damage this can cause if left undiscovered.

If water pipes are under the floor in a crawl space, drain these pipes or protect them from freezing. You can wrap them in electrical heat tape or take other measures. The local hardware store will know what works best in your geographical area. If there is not a drain at the lowest point in the fresh water system consider having one installed. It's a small price for protecting the parsonage pipes.

Drain the water heater tank. A burst water heater can spurt a

lot of water—fast. Before opening the drain, turn the control knob to "off". Connect a hose and drain outside.

If the home has a hot water heater, contact a plumber to drain the system.

If the home has a forced air furnace, turn off the emergency switch. It may be located outside of the furnace room. If a humidifier is present, drain and clean it. For buildings with electric heat, turn it down or off. If the heat is going to be left on, consider installing a low temperature thermostat. Most thermostats have a lowest setting of 55 degrees Fahrenheit. A low temperature model can be set as low as 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

In areas with intense summer heat, it is not a good idea to turn off the air conditioning system completely. You may consider turning the thermostat up to 80 degrees. This will help dehumidify the parsonage and keep it from turning into an oven.

There are several places in a bathroom where water might freeze. The toilet, sink, tub and shower all have water traps that prevent sewer gas from backing up into the parsonage. These traps need to be cleared and protected.

Flush the toilet to drain water from the tank. Dip the water from the bowl. Water will remain in the trap. If this water freezes, the porcelain will break. Use a plunger to force water through the trap. Pour about a quart of 50/50 mixture of water and antifreeze into the toilet, propylene glycol is preferred. It has an unpleasant taste for animals and is said to be more environmentally sound. This will eventually be flushed into the septic tank. Be as kind to it as possible.

Repeat the process of plunging out water and replacing with antifreeze mixture into the sink, tub and shower drains. A pint in each should be sufficient. Drain any hoses for handheld showerheads. Find all floor drains in the house and repeat.

Repeat the process in the kitchen. Drain the sprayer. Disconnect both ends of the dishwasher supply hose and drain. Remove the drain hose and place the end into a bucket. Operate the dishwasher on the drain cycle for a moment to be certain all of the water is cleared. If possible, disconnect the power supply.

Cracked or old washing machine hoses can cause 150 million dollars a year in damage. When preparing the washing machine for your absence, take a good look at the hoses. If they are worn or have bubbles, plan on replacing them before using the machine again.

Disconnect washing machine hoses and drain them. Run the washing machine on the fill cycle to clear the inlet valve. Run it on the warm water setting for a few seconds. Then run the drain cycle for a few moments to clear water from the pump. Drain the drain hose.

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If there are any subjects you would like to see addressed in this newsletter, or questions about a topic presented, please contact Ms. Amanda Weller, Gallagher Bassett Services, Inc., Two Pierce Place, Itasca, IL 60143, Telephone: 815-236-5170, Email: [Amanda\\_Weller@gbtpa.com](mailto:Amanda_Weller@gbtpa.com).

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(Closing Your Rectory or Convent-Checklist for Buildings Not in Use, continued from page 3)

**Clean the washer, dryer and dishwasher and apply a coat of appliance polish to protect the finish from corrosion.**

**Empty the refrigerator and freezer. Unplug the power. Block the door open with a piece of wood to prevent stale odors.**  
**Clean and polish the refrigerator and freezer.**

**Check in the pantry, cupboards and bathroom for items that can freeze and break. Remove these items. Also remove food that could be a meal for bears or other animals, or store it in metal containers.**

**Hide or remove items that might tempt a burglar. Tools, televisions and stereo equipment are sources of quick cash for thieves. Make the parsonage as unenticing to burglars as possible. Look through the window and if anything of value can be seen, move it or remove it.**

**Before you leave, place the markings for a fire in the fireplace or wood stove so that you will have a quick source of heat if you return in cold weather. Close the flue to cut down on cold air entry.**

**As you are leaving, place this guide where you can easily find it when you return to help restore everything to working order. Turn off electricity and gas if you are not leaving the heat on or relying on electrical heat tape.**

**It takes a little time and effort to properly close down a home but it pays off. The time and money you'll spend on repairs cuts into your living conditions. A little precaution pays big in the long run.**

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### Roof Inspection & Maintenance At-A-Glance

- ✓ Inspect flat roofs of buildings along with gutters, downspouts and flashing in late fall and early spring of each year or as needed.
- ✓ When inspecting the roof, look for cracks, puddles, missing shingles and rotten wood. Always work with another person and a solid, appropriate ladder to complete the inspection.
- ✓ For pitched roofs, consider having an outside roofing contractor periodically complete this same task.
- ✓ Roof drains on flat roofs should be routinely cleaned of leaves and other debris.
- ✓ Keep in mind that standing water on flat roofs leads to eventual roof leaks.

