



HAZARDOUS BUILDINGS BULLETIN

1st Quarter 2016

VACANT BUILDINGS: AN OPERATIONAL REALITY

On virtually every street within the City of Reading, vacant buildings are easy to recognize. Statistics show that crimes involving drugs and arson are notably higher in block that have vacant or abandoned buildings. The vacant or abandoned buildings are in various conditions. Many of the buildings can be rehabilitated. Although, many have outlived their usefulness and are simple dangerous as they stand.

234 South 8th Street



GET STARTED THE RIGHT AWAY

The terminology involving vacant and abandoned buildings is often confused. A vacant building is an occupied structure (residential or commercial) that has no permanent residents or occupants, but has had the overall condition and value preserved. An abandoned building has no legal occupants and has been neglected with no effort to safeguard contents or structural integrity.

The Beginning of Information for YOUR safety!

Q: What can I expect to read in the bulletin?

A: The purpose is to inform the members of the department that these buildings are numerous and contain specific safety concerns.

Q: How often will the bulletins be published?

A: The bulletins will be published on a quarterly basis. There could be situations that require additional bulletins.

Safety is Everyone's Responsibility!!!

GET THE PICTURE

The next page will have pictures of buildings in varying conditions. The overall goal is the education of members on dangerous building conditions that exist throughout the City of Reading.

The pictures could be taken from actual responses or from pictures submitted to the OFM. If you locate a property in your response district that you believe should be evaluated, notify the OFM to perform an inspection.

The future of this program will include the marking of buildings with signage to alert responding members of dangers within the building.

Our 1st safety bulletin will touch on our “bread and butter” fires—row dwellings. The majority of our working fires occur in 2, 2&1/2 or 3 story row dwellings and are also responsible for the majority of our fire fatalities over the years. Most of the housing stock is brick or wood frame dating back previous centuries with a mix of newer, lightweight construction. Most rowhomes are approximately 15 feet wide by 45 feet deep. Many share common front porches and a common cockloft which can lead to rapid fire spread. Interior stairs are usually found in the living room in a straight line with the front door. Larger rowhomes in areas such as Centre Park, southeast and northwest sections of the city may also contain rear stairwells off of the dining room or kitchen areas. Many rowhomes have been modified, neglected or suffered previous fire damage. Vacant dwellings may contain “shooting galleries” with discarded needles, large amounts of trash or debris, and even if boarded up or secured—squatters. Occupied dwellings are just as dangerous. Shoddy repairs or construction, hoarding or overcrowding, barred windows, lack of maintenance, etc. can make our jobs more challenging. Age, conditions and gravity are all working against us—size-up and situational awareness are paramount in a safe, successful operation. Know your enemy!



409 Elm Street.

- Front brick wall has been removed, replaced with 2x4 shoring.
- Exposures on either side are occupied.
- Notice sagging and uneven roof & gutter lines.



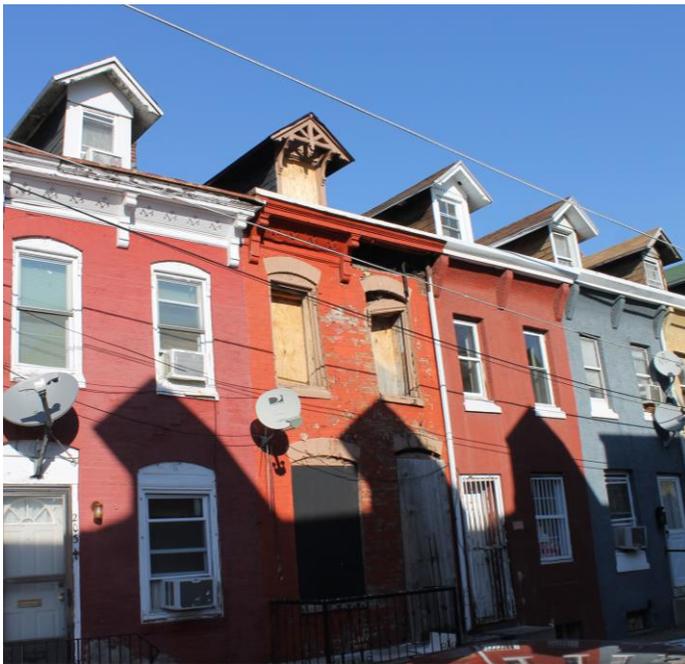
722 Walnut St

- Front Corner support removed or modified, unknown condition.
- Significant fire on first floor could cause significant collapse.



200 Block Hudson St

- Many buildings on the block have suffered previous fire damage over the years.
- Demolition and removal of adjoining contiguous dwellings has further weakened the remaining structures. (note the use of diamond plate tie-rods)
- Failure of lintel and brickwork on 2nd floor of dwelling evident in lower photo



941 N 11th Street

Securing properties has always been a concern. Metal bars, ½" plywood, or newer methods such as the VPS system (Pictured at left), are common.

Google Fire Engineering article for more information on the VPS system.



200 Block W Buttonwood

**“Stand alone”
dwellings that were
formerly row
dwellings have had
part of their stability
removed. Heavy fire
involvement could
result in an earlier
catastrophic
collapse. Note the
use of diamond
plate tie-rods. Lower
photo shows
construction
features of older
dwellings before
finishing stucco
applied. Modern
lightweight
construction fails
even sooner under
fire conditions!**