

# Appendix V

## Surveying Safely

### (Based on RICS 2004)

#### Protecting yourself

Some of us take better care of other people than we do of ourselves.

Please don't overwork. Don't squeeze in an extra job at the end of the day. Don't overwork in great heat, and keep warm in cold weather. Don't take unnecessary risks on site, and perhaps most importantly, don't drink alcohol, as many deaths on site are related to alcohol.

Also use extreme caution whilst taking medication. In addition:

- Make sure that business vehicles are well maintained.
- Don't try to drive long distances when you are tired.
- Keep a copy of the Highway Code in the office.
- Have you had anti-tetanus vaccinations?

The case of Suzy Lamplugh, an estate agent who disappeared while doing her job, brought home the need to be wary of escorting strangers around empty premises. Carry personal alarms and telephones. Make sure people know where you are going and with whom you are going. Work in pairs if visiting particularly dangerous areas.

Surveying can be a dangerous business and members are asked to take particular care in matters of personal safety.

However well a survey or pre-inspection is 'pre-planned', the individual surveyor needs to be alert to potential hazards during the inspection. The following hazards could be encountered when surveying buildings or sites.

#### Structures

The chance of partial or total collapse of:

- Chimney stacks, gable walls or parapets.
- Leaning, bulged and unrestrained walls (including boundary walls).
- Rotten or corroded beams and columns.
- Roofs and floors.

## Timbers

- Rotten and broken floors and staircases. Flimsy cellar flaps and broken pavement lights.
- Floorboards, joists and buried timbers weakened by age, decay or attack.
- Projecting nails and screws. Broken glass.
- Glazing in windows and partitions may be loose, hinges and sashcords weak or broken. Glass panels in doors and winglights may be painted over.

## Roofs

- Fragile asbestos cement and plastic coverings.
- Fragile rooflights (often obscured by dirt or temporary coverings).
- Low parapets or unguarded roof edges. Loose copings.
- Rusted, rotten or moss-covered fire escapes, access ladders and guard rails.
- Rotten roof decking and joists.
- Slippery roof coverings (slates, moss or algae-covered slopes).
- Broken access hatches.
- Mineral wool dust, mortar droppings and birds' nesting material and excrement in roof voids.
- Cornered birds and vermin.
- Insects, bugs and lice. Bee and wasp colonies.
- Water cooling plant may harbour *Legionella*.
- Unguarded flat roofs.
- Broken, loose, rotten and slippery crawling boards and escape ladders.
- Weak flat roofs and dust covered rooflights.
- Slippery roof surfaces.
- High winds during roof inspection.
- Ill-secured or flimsy, collapsible, sectional or fixed loft ladders.
- Concealed ceiling joists and low purlins.
- Ill-lit roof voids.

## Unsafe atmospheres

- Confined spaces with insufficient oxygen, including manholes, roof voids, cellars, vaults, ducts and sealed rooms.
- Rotting vegetation which may consume oxygen and give off poisonous fumes.
- Accumulation of poisonous or flammable gases in buildings on contaminated land.

- Stores containing flammable materials, such as paint, adhesives, fuel and cleaning fluids.
- Hazardous substances, including toxic insecticides and fungicides.
- Gas build-up in subfloor voids.

## **Danger from live and unsecured services**

- Electricity, gas, water and steam supplies.
- Awkward entrances into sub-stations and fuel stores.
- Temporary lighting installations: mains connections and generators.
- Buried cables and pipes.

## **Hidden traps, ducts and openings**

- Lift and services shafts, stairwells and other unguarded openings.
- Manholes, including those obscured by flimsy coverings. Cesspools, wells and septic tanks.

## **Intruders and others**

- Physical dangers from squatters and vagrants. Guard dogs.
- Health risks (including AIDS) from discarded syringes and condoms.
- Structures weakened by vandalism or arson.
- Aggressive tenants and property owners.

## **Contamination**

- Asbestos, lead and other substances hazardous to health.
- PCB and PCN chemicals in electrical transformers and capacitors in fluorescent lighting fittings.
- Overhead electrical cables.
- Contaminated water supplies.
- Contaminated air conditioning systems (*Legionella*).

## **Vermin and birds**

- Rats and mice: Weil's and other diseases.
- Bird droppings.
- Lice may be present in bedding, soft furniture and carpets.

## Travelling to and from site

- Driving too fast, for too long or when tired.
- Use of hand-held car telephones on the move – now illegal.

After a survey, the property should be left secure. You should make sure at all times that someone in the office or at home knows where you will be, especially when working in remote places or empty buildings, by establishing an open diary regime.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 places a duty on employers to take reasonable measures to ensure the safety of their employees. Employees have similar responsibilities to take care of their own safety. Discharging these responsibilities involves the process of risk assessment in which hazards, or events likely to lead to harm, are identified and then assessed in terms of the likelihood of the event occurring and the severity of the harm that would result.

Having identified a hazard and assessed the risk involved there are two options: to remove the hazard by replanning the work process or activity, or to accept that the hazard will remain but replan the work process or activity in order to reduce the likelihood of the hazard occurring or to reduce the severity of the consequences if it does. Either option will involve consideration of working methods and, if necessary, documenting a safe method of work or method statement for the activity.

No amount of training can deal with every eventuality but these notes should provide a useful checklist and prompt for deciding whether a hazard exists and how best to reduce risk.

## Premises

When instructed to inspect premises, the basic factors that need to be considered will include the following.

### *Type*

- What type of site/building is it?
- If a construction site, what stage has been reached?
- If an existing building, what is the form of construction and age?

### *High structures*

- Are any towers, masts or tall chimneys involved?
- How will they be accessed for inspection?
- Is special access equipment needed and who is to provide/manage it?

### ***Condition***

- Are the premises known to be derelict or in poor condition? What is the nature of the damage?
- Are security measures in force and how is access to be gained?
- Is protective clothing required?
- Is any special access equipment needed?

### ***Occupation***

- Who are you likely to encounter on site?
- Are the occupants or neighbours likely to be aggressive or disaffected?

### ***Activity***

- If a building/site is occupied, what is the nature of that occupation? What might you encounter, e.g. noise, fumes, vehicle movements?

### ***Special risks***

- Is the nature of the building or site such that it presents special hazards?

### ***Special access***

- Will special access arrangements be required and who will provide and manage them?
- Does the surveyor need special training?
- If a scaffold exists, is it safe to use? When was it last inspected by a competent person?

### ***Site rules***

- Does the premises manager have house rules?
- Are there permit to work/enter procedures?
- If a site, is there a construction phase health and safety plan including induction procedures?

### ***Dangerous substances***

- Is the inspection likely to bring you into contact with noxious atmospheres or explosives?

### ***Vermin or diseases***

- Is the nature of the site such that it could be contaminated with any form of clinical waste?

- Is the surveyor likely to encounter used syringes/needles, condoms, razor blades?
- Could the site be a source of anthrax which, for example, could be present in haired plaster?
- Could *Legionella* be present?
- Might the surveyor encounter vermin, e.g. rats, on the site?

Having considered the physical hazards that might exist, these need to be considered in the light of personal and environmental issues, as follows.

### ***Environmental***

- Will weather conditions and/or light levels increase risk? Will temperature extremes present a hazard?

### ***Personal***

- Does the surveyor's gender or level of fitness have any bearing on the hazards which have been identified? Would lack of fitness present a hazard?
- Are special skills required and does the surveyor concerned have those skills?
- Does the surveyor have phobias/suffer from vertigo or claustrophobia?

### ***Welfare and security***

- Is lone working a safe option? What provisions are made for communications in an emergency?
- How would access for rescue be achieved?
- Does a lone worker suffer from any medical condition which could affect personal safety?
- Are toilet, wash and first-aid facilities required?

### ***Special equipment***

In certain circumstances any of the following equipment may be necessary: gloves, respirators, safety helmet, ear defenders or temporary lighting.

The above lists are not exhaustive and the extent to which any of the items might be relevant will vary.