



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [Community News](#) / [El Dorado County News](#).

El Dorado eyes fines for owners who don't maintain vacant buildings

By Cathy Locke - clocke@sacbee.com

Published 12:00 am PST Thursday, March 6, 2008

With foreclosures on the rise, El Dorado County officials moved to protect neighborhoods by imposing stiff penalties for property owners who fail to maintain vacant buildings.

Under an ordinance introduced last week by the Board of Supervisors, banks, mortgage companies and investors who fail to maintain and monitor vacant buildings could be hit with fines ranging from \$1,000 for a first violation to as much as \$10,000 for repeat violations.

Jim Wassner, county code enforcement supervisor, said the measure is intended to ensure that houses and other vacant buildings are secured to prevent children or vagrants from getting inside.

He noted that supervisors had voiced concerns that boarded-up buildings are a clear sign they are vacant. Wassner said the proposed ordinance states "only access points to the building that can no longer be secure by normal means need to be boarded."

Real estate agent Sherilyn Alarcon urged the board to adopt the ordinance.

"This is a very big problem," she said.

It's terrible to go into a vacant home and find that someone has been broken in and damaged it, Alarcon said.

Art Marinaccio, representing the Taxpayers Association of El Dorado County, urged the board to postpone action on the ordinance until budget hearings are held.

With the county facing an estimated \$15.6 million in budget cuts, he said this is not the time to add programs.

Marinaccio asked whether ensuring maintenance of vacant buildings was of enough value to consider dropping other programs to make room for it.

"This is not a program. This is a tool," Wassner said.

Code enforcement officers already deal with these properties, but their job is made more difficult when they can't get banks, mortgage companies or out-of-town investors to respond to problems, he said.

The code enforcement staff prioritizes cases based on the danger they pose to the public. Vacant buildings that aren't properly maintained typically pose greater hazards than signs that don't conform to county code, he said.

Wassner cited a case in which someone had entered a vacant house, put a tree branch in the fireplace and set fire to it. Three-quarters of the tree branch was outside the fireplace where it could have set fire to the house, he said.

Without stiff penalties, Wassner said, it can be difficult to persuade absentee owners to take responsibility for vacant properties.

Since other jurisdictions began adopting similar ordinances last year, Wassner said, large banks and mortgage companies have provided code enforcement offices with contact information for their properties.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

[Copyright](#) © [The Sacramento Bee](#)