

Homes Not Jails



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Introduction

Since 1992, Homes Not Jails has been housing people in San Francisco's many vacant buildings. We believe that housing is a basic human right—a right which supersedes any property "rights".

Because the government will not honor this right, we formed to house people through direct action, by taking over some of the vacant housing. Through these "squats," we have housed hundreds of people. People housed through Homes Not Jails often become a crucial part of the overall HNJ "movement," helping to open up new housing, support other squats, and participate in public housing takeover actions.

Homes Not Jails operates as a collective. Anybody who is active in HNJ or who is housed in one of the squats is a member and participates equally in all decision making by the group. We operate on a consensus model, briefly meaning that any decision made is agreed to by the entire group.

Besides directly housing people in covert squats, HNJ also holds regular public housing takeovers. These are civil disobedience actions in which people march to vacant buildings and publicly take one or more over, demanding use as permanent, affordable housing.



Covert Squats—What Are They?

There are thousands of empty, unused housing units in San Francisco. We identify these units and then set them up as squats. . At our regular meetings, we will typically have a number of such buildings ready for use as housing. The number and quality may vary each week, but we often have a number of high quality places available.

The steps taken in opening up new housing and making it available for people include:

Identification & Research: Once a potential site is identified, we will research it and assess its potential. We will determine, as best we can, who the landlord is, where s/he live, and reasons why the structure is vacant and unused.

Opening The Housing: When a space has been identified and assessed, an "Away team" will open up the building. People will go inside and assess its suitability and determine which utilities are working and functional.

Securing The Housing: HNJ people will then change locks on the doors and attempt to get basic utilities working (if they aren't already).

Supporting The Housing: Once people have moved in, HNJ members will help turn on utilities which may not be working, help people with further research, help with repairs, etc. The weekly meetings have an agenda item called "squat reports", to determine what support new squatters need, and help with any concerns.

Are These Squats Legal?

This is housing provided through direct action. Because their laws favor property rights over human rights, our use of the housing is illegal. At least during the initial period of squatting, people living in the housing are trespassing. This does not mean you will be arrested. What it does mean, though, is that if the police find you during the initial weeks, they may have the authority to order you to vacate.

Be advised that the police are supposed to have a complaint from the owner (or have visibly seen you trespass) before they can order you to leave. Often police don't care about a technicality like this and arguing it is worthless. As discussed in more detail later, however, once you are established in your squat, this technicality can be very useful.

Under trespassing laws, you must be provided an opportunity to leave before you are arrested. Unless you refuse to leave, you will not be arrested (unless you have outstanding warrants).

If there is ever an arrest, we will help get you an attorney through the National Lawyers Guild.

How Permanent Is The Housing?

Sometimes spaces will last a long time, sometimes a very short time. Despite our best research, it's impossible to know how neighbors, landlords or police will react once people are living in a vacant building. The first few weeks are the best indicator of how permanent your housing may be.

If your housing does not work out, we will try to re-house you. Sometimes people have to go through four or five spaces until they find one which gets established. Sometimes a long-term squat gets found on the first try. Sometimes we have had to re-squat the same house three or four times before it gets established.

Sometimes you will be told in the beginning that your house will only be short term. We often have such short-term places available for when more people are looking for housing than we have available. If you move into a short term squat, we will instruct you on how best to handle it and we'll re-house you in one with more potential as soon as possible.

Regardless of your housing's potential, during the initial weeks, you'll be vulnerable to landlord or police attempts to kick you out. Be aware that sometimes landlords will take "self-help" action and lock you out of your squat while you are gone. If this happens, HNJ will help you get back in, if necessary.

The information contained here includes advice on how to get your housing established and legally protected during these initial weeks and thereafter.



Making Squats Last

How your household (and often the neighbors) handle the first few weeks will often determine whether or not the housing becomes long-term. Your goal should be to ease your way into the consciousness of the neighbors and others.

It's good to have a "story" as to why you are now living in the formerly empty house. What often works well is that you are living in the house while you will be fixing it up, which is usually the truth. Neighbors are often happy to hear that the ugly, vacant building in their neighborhood is going to be fixed up and lived in. Sometimes a neighbor will know the landlord and will know for a fact that you are not supposed to be in the building. This is a difficult situation to deal with since a lot of the work establishing the house depends on bluffing people who don't know the facts.

More often, the neighbors don't know the landlord and the initial problem is frightened neighbors who call the police in the first few days. Over time, we have had success with neighbors when they've learned our intent to set up clean and stable households. Initially, though, they can fear we are burglars or drug users looking for a shooting gallery. To ease their fears, people should pay extra attention in the first few days to being "model" neighbors. People should try to be as quiet as possible, and keep their comings and goings to a minimum.

As you get settled, you should try to be friendly with neighbors and demonstrate your responsibility by keeping the outside of the house clean and free of trash. Until they get to know you, neighbors are always a potential problem as police will respond to their complaints and attempt to evict the squatters. Every neighborhood is different and you should try to fit into your neighborhood—a quiet, residential neighborhood requires more effort on your part to not disturb neighbors.

Homes Not Jails Squat Agreements



We have three basic agreements which, from experience, help squats get through the initial few weeks.

These agreements are not for any moral reason but instead are to help stabilize the home by preventing internal problems and neighborhood opposition. (We do not want to impose rules on peoples' behavior or change how they choose to live their life, but since squatting is both risky and illegal, we need to make sure we don't create more problems for ourselves).

It is up to each house how these "rules" get implemented; many houses which have ignored these "rules", though, have been closed down by the police in a short time.

The three agreements are:

(1) No drug use or alcohol use in the houses

Neighbors and police expect that an illegal squat will be full of drugs and booze. When it's not, the squatters are in a much better position to claim a right to be there. Also, drugs and alcohol often bring in negative energy and typically result in squatters arguing and fighting with each other.

(2) No violence —

We are and must be non-violent. Creative forms of civil disobedience are great. We don't have the power to fight the system with force, but right is on our side and that is our power. No violence in the house. We have lost great houses because of fighting inside it.

(3) Each house in Homes Not Jails is autonomous and run by consensus of all people living in it.

This means that everyone living in the house decides together all "house" decisions, ranging from chores to new residents. No single person is in charge. These are collectively run households.

So You're In A Squat...Now What?

Our experience in Homes Not Jails has taught us that the events which follow the opening of an abandoned space tend to follow a pattern. This is a guide to those who may be in a squat for the first time.

The information contained below should not be taken as a "must do", but should be read and considered as guidelines. While every squat is different, with different situations requiring different techniques and strategies, some of the following suggestions may be useful.

The first few days or weeks are often the most difficult and tense in a new space. Be as "normal" and quiet as possible when you first move in! This is the time when neighbors and police most often get alerted and scared. We are suddenly moving a bunch of people into a building the neighbors know is vacant. If we are too noisy, the police will be called. Ideally, neighbors will come to realize over time that people have moved in. If their first knowledge comes from seeing people coming and going normally and responsibly, they will likely not think too much about it.

Initial "security" is very important. The door must be kept locked or you may wake to find the police or other intruders inside your home. At some point, you may have to deal with the police, owner, or property manager, but this is best done on your terms and after you have had a chance to clean up the house, bring in furniture, have lights and water working, etc. If the police first deal with you as you are cooking dinner in a furnished home, their response will be drastically different than if they see you sleeping on the floor of an obviously abandoned house.

Other, unwanted strangers may also try to get in and check out what you are doing there. They may be neighbors or drug users who have used the place as a shooting gallery. Again you want to deal with strangers on your terms, so keep the door and other entrances secured. It is in some circumstances best to set up round-the-clock security watches (everyone taking shifts of 2-3 hours). It is also best to keep at least two people in the house at all times to make sure the owner, police or strangers don't break in while you're gone. If you have to leave and need to leave belongings behind, ask someone you know to take care of them in case an eviction happens while you're gone.

Work out a code knock or doorbell ring. Do not open the door without checking who it is. If they are not known to you, talk to them through the door or gate. If they claim to be police or the landlord, ask to see ID if it's plain clothes person. If it's obviously police, or the ID matches the name known as the landlord, step outside to talk to them. Have someone lock the door behind you and stand ready to let you in. Best possible scenario is to have someone with you while you talk as a witness. A twenty-four hour watch on the door and having someone present in the house at all times is a good idea.

Make sure all residents know who has the key to the building. If possible, make copies and distribute them. Leave a copy of the key inside the building in an inconspicuous place where everyone can get at it. Leave a hidden copy of the key outside the building where everyone can get at it.

The First Few Days

The first few days are the hardest, the most stressful. Relating to your housemates can be tough. Utilities may not be on, and the amount of cleanup can be staggering in appearance.

You may have seen some squats which have been running for months and can't envision your place ever looking as nice. However, those places looked as bad or worse when people first moved in. It's not all that much work when you all pitch in and it can be well worth it. Once you get rid of the trash and garbage you might realize you have a beautiful San Francisco home.

Here's some hints to help you get going..

- Begin cleanup in common areas—kitchen, bathroom. Do the individuals sleeping areas last, after all the common areas are ready. It gives a feeling of being in it together and helps to set up some system to know where to keep the trash bags or candles etc. Have a first nite together in the same room, sharing stories and getting to know each other. Open the windows and air the place well. Be careful with candles if the power is not on yet. Candles are a fire risk and attract attention. Modern LED technologies have advanced enough to make a decent battery lamp bright and efficient. Remember light attracts attention, be careful by windows
- Have a house meeting once a day to keep lines of communication open as to who is doing what when and where they will be tomorrow. A shared late breakfast is a good time to do this. Some people will be better at some things than others—go with this.
- Set up a house fund when everyone gets paid. Some houses ask people to chip in \$20 every 1st and 15th and use the money to change locks, get utilities legal, buy food, etc.
- Let people know what you need for assistance. Homes Not Jails has people who can: turn on power, water, and gas. We also have people who know about how to repair buildings, change locks, etc. You can put the requests for assistance of this nature on HNJ phone line or talk to people at the Tuesday nite meetings.
- Go out and scavenge for furniture. Bringing in some furniture will help you be comfortable and will make it look more like your home, helpful for both you and if the police come by.

Settling In

After a few weeks or maybe a month or so you'll find that the neighbors have gotten used to your presence and the cops haven't kicked you out and the landlord has not shown up and (this part is confusing. What is an initial period? How can you be hassled by the cops without either getting kicked out or establishing tenancy?) the building is cleaned up and livable and the utilities are on, the difficulties of the house change. It is no longer a squat, it is a Home and maintaining the energy that changed it from a filthy abandoned place to a home can be hard.

First month(s)

Regular house meetings help here. Readjust the security system to take into account the lessened need for 24 hour vigilance. Begin to determine home stuff things like who is cooking dinner, how much money people want to contribute for food and utilities and so on. We strongly recommend house meetings take place at least 3 times a week. Figure out a guest policy that works—how long a guest can stay, if residents are responsible for their guests, and whether or not the house can take more people. Try and get to the weekly Homes Not Jails meetings

Meetings are every Tuesday at 8pm 417 South Van Ness

to give a house report about how the house is doing and what it needs. Building supplies and cleaning supplies are available from Homes Not Jails people. We have also scheduled "barn-raising days" with members to clean up or rebuild.

Despite Everything, You Got Kicked Out...

First of all, try and get the cops to let you get all your possessions out when they make you leave. If house members are not around at the time of the eviction, try and get the police to let you leave a note. Put the eviction on the Tenants Union phone line. We often have backup places immediately available. Most important, get the word out, fall back on the movement, and know that you are not alone.

Homes Not Jails info line: 1-877-50-7-7-8-2-8

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Dealing With Police and Landlords Making Your Squat Permanent

The Police

—The police may show up on their own, because of a complaint from a neighbor or because of a complaint from the landlord. Don't be scared, be polite and be gently assertive of your right to be there. The police can only take action if they have a complaint from the landlord or can determine that criminal activity (e.g. drug use) is occurring. If they have a complaint from the landlord (or he is present), verify that it is the same person as the name Homes Not Jails provided you with. If it is not, tell the police the person is not the landlord and they can not act on that complaint. This is **Penal Code 602** which enable police to act only upon a complaint from the property owner and which says you must both trespass and then refuse to leave. The police will probably ask you who the landlord is; if so, use your judgment as to whether or not you want to tell them the name of the person. (You could use an excuse that another tenant who is not there deals with the landlord and has that information. Or you could confidently say who the landlord is and try to bluff the police). If they have a valid complaint from the landlord and you have only been squatting for few days, you have probably lost your case and will want to negotiate your way out—ask for a number of hours to contact everyone and to have time to move your belongings. If this happens, call the tenants union (415) 282-6622 and the HNJ hotline.

If the police have no complaint from the landlord, then you have more bargaining power but you will need to be assertive and have some "ammunition" on your side. The police will likely suspect that you are trespassing, however, they have internal rules which they should follow when dealing with a possible trespass situation, these are in *Tenants Rights Handbook which are available at the tenants union, 558 capp street, ask for an older copy to get one for free. Generally, these rules say police should not treat people as trespassers if the occupants can show any evidence of "tenancy." The best evidence is (1) a key to the front door, (2) utility bills in your name, (3) mail addressed and delivered to you at that address, and (4) identification with that address listed on it.

You should immediately begin collecting evidence of tenancy. Arrange for mail to be sent to you. Change the lock on the front door. Have the utilities turned on in your name as soon as possible. Get the morning paper delivered. Show this evidence to the police if they come by. Meet together and agree on your "cover story." For instance, that you are care-takers of the building and that the landlord has consented to your being there in exchange for security and maintenance/fix-up work. Police will ask to see a written agreement. Tell them it was agreed to orally.

The appearance of your home will also have an impact. If it is clean and obviously a home (chairs, beds, tables, etc.), police will have further doubts and can determine there is no criminal activity going on. Invite them to see the inside of the building if they want. Attempt to show that we are not using drugs and are maintaining a clean and safe environment, cleaning up, fixing up, etc. Small children and parents help. If the police still persist that you are trespassing, you must become more assertive and tell them they have no proof. Request that they call their patrol supervisor. Tell them you are members of the Tenants Union and have a copy of the police rules regarding trespass vs. tenancy which is also in the tenants rights handbook (show it to them). Tell them they can be personally sued if they evict you as trespassers when you are tenants.

If the police and landlord come together after you have been living there awhile and at a time when you have collected proper evidence of a tenancy, you should maintain your position that you have a right to be there. Show your evidence and tell the police you and the landlord are having a dispute about your tenancy tell them it's a civil matter, not a police matter, and they should advise the landlord to get his attorney and file an eviction action against you rather than trying to lock you out with the help of the police. Advise again they can be personally if they evict you as trespassers, which is technically true but may not be enforced by a judge. **It may be useful to mention these things, or it may make the situation more tense.**

Use your discretion.

The Landlord

If the landlord comes by alone, try to talk to him. Let him know it's Homes Not Jails (we are fairly well known and respected). Tell him about the rules. Invite him inside to see how you've cleaned up. Generally, try to negotiate his permission to let you stay there in exchange for your continued clean-up and repair work. Feel free to give him the numbers listed at the end if he has questions you are not comfortable with. If he is not cooperative and you have collected evidence of tenancy (see above), tell him you have met legal requirements of tenancy. You might want to challenge him to call the police and confront them both with your evidence. If you can get the police to tell the landlord your evidence is sufficient, then you have won a major battle. As bad as the police can be, the landlord can be worse sometimes. Do not let them in if you think they may become violent. Make them get the police. If it's early in your squat and you don't have evidence of tenancy, you may decide you have lost and again will want to negotiate for a few hours to collect everyone's belongings.

DEALING WITH NEIGHBORS

It's usually best to stick with a "cleaning up the house in return for a place to stay. It's a very good idea to do some role playing to get the story straight and you don't end up stuttering an excuse and sounding sketchy. Role play is even better use for dealing with police, ways to deflect questions while still maintaining control of the situation can be hard and you need practice to counter their training.

Many neighbors are very uneasy about "squats", especially if they own property, or if the property has been squatted by drug users before. This is understandable. They may claim to be looking out for the interests of the property owner. Reassure them about our intent, tell them about our rules against violence and drugs. Invite them to Homes Not Jails meetings or even over for dinner. A good arguing point is that this is being done because of necessity—138 homeless people died in the past 3 years on the streets of San Francisco. Again, keep cool, negotiate, use your powers of persuasion.

Available housing

Housing we have available each week can vary in quality and potential for longevity. Our successful squats usually have working utilities and hot water. Sometimes, the housing was entered weeks ago, has had our own locks on it since then and now has working electricity and plumbing. Sometimes, though, it was first entered within the week and we haven't been able to get the electricity and plumbing working. We tend to reject any housing where we will not be able to get electricity and plumbing working, although we make such housing available for emergency or temporary use. If the utilities are not yet working, we will use the skills of people in Homes Not Jails to get them working in upcoming days.

Besides rejecting housing, which is in very poor condition, we will also reject housing where we find signs the landlord is visiting or working regularly. Also rejected is housing with signs of other recent squatters or housing where the neighbors have been especially nosy when we entered.

Despite our best efforts, the success of new squats can never be determined until people are actually living there. Sometimes people are evicted in a matter of days or weeks. Others have lasted from day one. Our longest squat (715 page street) was opened in January of 1993 and lived in until the Fall of 2000. Our shortest ones have been closed the next day. The rules we have about drug use, fighting and getting along with neighbors are crucial to the success of new squats. The first few weeks usually indicate whether a place is going to last long-term.

The places we move into on Tuesday nights (after meetings) have usually been opened up and we have keys to them. Sometimes people from other squats will stay with new squatters for the first few days to help people get used to living in a squat.

FINDING SQUAT'S



San Francisco has the most valuable land in the country. Finding squats here is not as easy as in some cities where lower property values cause more landlords to walk away (and abandon) their property. Still, there is a lot of vacant housing here (at least 30,000 housing units according to 2010 census) with much of it held empty by landlords for real estate speculation and/or tax purposes.

Finding potential squats is one of the most important tasks in Homes Not Jails. Every week, our “away team” goes out to open up vacant buildings which have been reported to us. We need a constant supply to house new people and to re-house people who’ve been evicted.



The Following are some guidelines for people who want to help identify vacant buildings.

There Is No Magic List

Walking & Riding Around Works Best

Contrary to what people hope or believe, there is no magic list of vacant housing at City Hall or any other place. We've looked and tried various means to compile such a list from various city agencies. It hasn't worked. What has clearly worked is people walking or riding around neighborhoods, thoroughly looking to find vacant buildings.

There are a couple of good ways to do this:

(1) **Take Responsibility For An Area**--We can give you a map which will be your "franchise." Then, once every week or two, you walk or ride around the area covering every street and alley and thoroughly scoping it out. From time to time, we'll also give you lists of properties in that area which bear checking out (because they're in tax default, people have just been evicted, etc.). We can also give you a list of what buildings in that area we've attempted to squat and been kicked out of (or which have been unusable for some other reason). Apartments simply for rent should be ignored, but any building totally empty or nearly empty (for example, 3 out of 4) should be noted.

(2) **Never Go The Same Way**--In your regular travels around town, try to go a new way or down a new street each time. If you regularly go by some alley, ride or walk down it some time. If you usually ride on Page Street, try Hayes Street sometimes. A general rule of thumb: if you can get some place by a street you've never been down before, take the new street. And keep your eyes open.

(3) Volunteer For Door To Door Work--The best way to thoroughly check out a house is to walk up to the door and poke around to see if it looks at all promising. If you walk down a street going up to each house and jiggle doorknobs, peer in windows, etc., you'll probably be arrested within half a block. But, if you're delivering something door to door, you have a legitimate excuse. On an ongoing basis, the Tenants Union has a newspaper which you can distribute door to door and during elections, campaigns are always looking for someone to deliver their flyers door to door. We've found some of our best squats this way and they're usually places which don;t stand out and which we wouldn't have noticed otherwise.

(4) Keep Your Eyes Open & Write It Down--Wherever you go, keep your eyes open for vacant buildings. Always have something with you so you can write it down. Too often, people have spotted something promising and then forgot which street it was on. If nothing to write on or with is available call the hotline to tell us the address and cross street. The hotline number is 1-877-50-SQUAT



VACANT BUILDINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY APPEAR TO BE



We've broken into boarded up buildings and been shocked to find them occupied. Our best squat didn't even look empty, never mind abandoned. In other words, you need to look carefully and sometimes you need to check a place out pretty thoroughly before you know for sure. This is important; it's no fun when someone opens the door as you're about to crowbar it!

Following are some hints for identifying vacant buildings:

1) Check Twice--Generally, it's a good idea to check a place at least twice and at different times of the day. For example, if you spot something, go back again at night and see if there's any lights on.

(2) Boarded Up & Padlocked--These are the most obvious and easiest to spot. If it's fully boarded up (every door & window), it's a pretty certain bet. If it's partially boarded up (just some windows) check again at night for lights. Sometimes there's not much difference between a slum and an empty building. Look for signs that other people are squatting; for example, if a padlock is turned so it's accessible only from the inside, it probably means there's other squatters there.

(3) Piled Up Mail--This is one of the best signs. If the mailbox is stuffed with old mail, it's almost a certainty. This is one of the advantages of walking up to the door of each house.

(4) Trashy Doorway--Look at the doorways for accumulated trash. When people are not walking in and out of a door, the trash accumulates against the door and there's usually more of it than the average messy doorway. Look at the trash cans too too, for old, old newspapers, mail, or recent looking garbage/compost.

(5) Electric Meters--If the electric meters are accessible, check them out. If the place is occupied, the big horizontal wheel in the middle will be turning. You have to look close as sometimes it's turning almost invisibly (if the refrigerator, for example, is the only appliance turned on). Sometimes refrigerators in abandoned buildings are plugged in so the meters aren't a sure sign, just another clue

(6) Windows--If you can, look around to see if it looks at all promising. Otherwise, check out the windows for plants or furniture. Try to actually put your nose up to the window and peer inside. Remember, many SF apartments have views and people often keep their windows uncluttered; empty-looking second floor windows aren't always a meaningful sign. On the other hand, seeing a healthy plant in a window is almost always a bad sign. Also, in the occasional hot spells, check out a place to see if any windows are open (a bad sign). Are shades up now and they used to be down?

(7) General Rundown Condition--A vacant building is not going to have a new paint job or a neatly cared for garden. Check out the general condition; look for flaking and fading paint, broken windows, hanging gutters, etc. Remember that vacant buildings and slums can look alike, so don't just rely on the fact that the place looks rundown.

(8) Lock Boxes--These are the realtor boxes which hang from doorways and contain keys. They are usually on buildings which are for sale. Usually the places are vacant, but not always. In the good old days, lock boxes were everywhere. Now they're few and far between. A place which is for sale is not apt to last for any substantial length of time although we've had some surprising success with a few of them. These lock boxes, though, provide for great instant squats which come in handy when people get evicted or there are more people looking for housing than there is housing available. If you see a lock box, check to make sure the place is vacant and--if so--let us know the address of the lock box.



(9) Assess entry. Whats the best way in and what tools do we need? Is there a security gate? Afire escape? Plywood (and is it attatched by nails or screws)? Is the front or side door most accessible? Or windows? If there are signs that it might be squatted. Do you think others may have found and squatted it first? Could it be a crack house? If its obviously vacant but you see lights on, people coming and going, or padlocks accessible from the inside, there are signs it may already be squatted. Maybe leave a note to start a dialog with the squatters to share resources and skills in your community.

(10) ownership. If you know how to do research at city hall, take the vacant addresses to the assessors and recorders officer. Find out who owns it, where they live, what liens are on it and other documents which may explain vacancy further. If you don't know how to do this research, set up a training time with someone who does.

What Are Some Bad Signs?

Following are some things you'll find which mean the place will probably not work:

- (1) Active Construction--If there's construction or renovation going on, it's not usually worth it. Look for scaffolding, signs of recent work (new paint, woodwork, etc), ladders and tools inside, etc.
- (2) Really Bad Fires--We'll usually try a place with minor fire damage, but if it looks like the fire was major, skip it.
- (3) For Sale/Good Condition/No Lock Box--A place which is in good condition and up for sale and which does not have a lock box is usually not going to last as a squat. If there's a lockbox, we'll try it; if not, it's more work than it's worth. On the other hand, a rundown place which has been up for sale for a long time is worth going after even if it doesn't have a lockbox.
- (4) All-Glass Storefronts--There's two bad things about these. First, if it's all glass, it's going to be impossible for squatters to stay discrete. Second, the doors on these storefronts usually have locks which are part of the door frame and really difficult to open. The exception to this would be a storefront that's rundown, out of the way and locked by just a chain and padlock (or otherwise easy to get into).

Getting The Info To The Away Team

Once you've identified a place, the next step is to get it to the Away Team. You can do this in 2 ways:

--Call 1-877-50-SQUAT

--Bring it to the HNJ meeting, Tuesdays at 8pm at 417 South Van Ness between 15th and 16th streets

The info you need to pass on:

(1) The address, cross street and description of building.

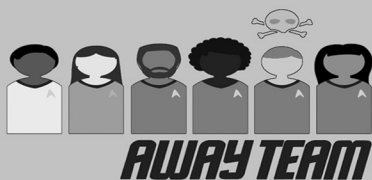
(2) Any research you've done on the landlord

(see separate handout on research).

(3) Your evaluation of how to get in. This is important since people need to know what tools to bring. If it's a padlock, describe the size. If you see a window open, check to see how easy it would be to reach the window via a climb. Describe what type of doors it has (security gate, wood door, etc.). Let people know if there's a side/back yard or alley and what access might be there. Look for access via the roof and how easy it would be to get to the roof.

(4) Be specific. House? Storefront? Apartments? What's the neighborhood like?





General tips:

-Carry small, light tools: butter knife, gloves, 12" flat bar, pointy toed shoes (good for climbing), flashlight and one other source of light (cell phone, lighter), extra batteries,

nothing illegal, nothing suspicious. Any work involving heavier items can be done later. Normally access doesn't involve heavy tools. Keep those jobs separate. never carry more than you need. If possible have someone "on call" at the tool location with transport to bring needed tools to the location.

-Never go on away teams alone, AT LEAST TWO people per team. For many reasons, a second pair of eyes, a hand to drag you from the hole in the floor. Someone to help you remember the name of that guy from Roxy music who looks like a leprechaun, that's been driving you crazy all night, help figuring out access problems, etc.

-Wear dark, comfortable clothes(no shorts), long sleeves, gloves (climbing, bicycle or more modern carpenter gloves). Clothes should be loose enough to allow movement but not so loose as to get caught on fences and nails.

-Remember the three S's at all times (most importantly) Safety, Stealth and Speed

Assessing the building/property

Double check to make sure it is vacant. Knock on door.

Why is it vacant? Trashed, indicating no one is living there? Are there tools inside indicating that there might be work being done currently ?

Something to look for to get an idea of the situation of the last occupants of the house. Names? On door, mailbox, Old newspapers (latest date on a newspaper), circulars, mail (what is the latest post date on mail)

While checking out the place, are there plants? Dead plants good, live plants bad (nothing against plants, mind you)

-Watch the trash pick up, if neighbors have theirs out and the future home doesn't

car in driveway? Is it the neighbors car? Sometimes people park in a known empty houses driveway when they cant find street parking.

Is building left unsecured (open doors, windows, etc.)?

*use tape or wire to see if door is being breached. OR put a piece of wire in a lock. If it's been removed, someone is using the lock to enter. Wrap tape around a gate at the top or the bottom, somewhere where its not immediately obvious to someone entering the house. Tape the door if there's no gate or put a piece of scotch tape over the lock that will be broken when a key is put in it.

-See if it has a lock box with keys, shake it and see

-Is debris collecting in door ways, garage and corners?

-Are the curtains always closed? do they open and close at different times, or are always the same level of open?

-Is the garden and lawn kept up? Dead plants good, live plants bad

-Watch for light inside at dusk to help determine vacancy, if the same lights are on at the same time everyday, it may be on a timer.

-Alarm company? alarms installed/active?

-Where are the motion light, both on the house in question and surrounding housing?

Check the electric meter, is the wheel turning, is electricity being used?

Electricity being used doesn't indicate occupancy. A refrigerator could be left on, a light, time machine, etc

Entering the building:

- Have a reason/objectives before entering a property eg: establish vacancy, length of disuse, potential future use (did workers leave tools, paint?)

-Find the easiest, least damaging way in.

- Does it look staged (sometimes properties for sale have rented furniture installed to give the "livable" feeling to it in hopes of making the property more attractive to potential buyers).

- Be QUICK- check utilities, mail, and secure reentry to the most stealthy and least obvious entrance/exit (i.e. don't leave the back door unlocked, leave a window unlocked instead.). Leave several way to reenter the building.

Have at least one look outside, to partner who is in cell contact. Have a predetermined system of warning and communication.

- Don't get overly emotional/worried/anxious and enter under questionable circumstances.

- If you have a bad feeling or reason to think you might be caught, go with your gut; if there is ever any doubt, there is no doubt, don't do it!--you can always come back later.

This is somewhat athletic work and requires a healthy limber body. Keep in shape to the best of your ability. **STRETCH BEFORE GOING OUT!!** a healthy body keeps you moving fast, strength allows to to access places a little bit out of reach, a healthy mind keeps you from making bad decisions.

HOMES
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Tuesday



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