

FINAL

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Legal disputes involving squatters surge due to financial crisis

- **Affluent areas including Chelsea, Belgravia and Mayfair targeted**

The number of legal disputes relating to squatters surged during the financial crisis according to statistics from Sweet & Maxwell, the leading legal information provider.

There were 10 cases related to squatters and trespassers heard in the High Court in 2008, up from 2 in 2007 (latest data available). There was 1 case in 2006, and none in 2005.

According to Sweet & Maxwell, traditionally very few cases against squatters reach the High Court.

Sweet & Maxwell says that most cases against squatters get resolved long before they reach the High Court so this significant rise represents just the top of the pile.

As the number of vacant properties rose during the crisis, landlords increasingly had to tackle illegal occupiers.

There have been a number of highly publicised cases involving squatters occupying grand houses in wealthy London areas including Chelsea, Belgravia and Mayfair. Squatters recently occupied a house in Chester Square, Belgravia where neighbours include Irina Abramovich and Margaret Thatcher.

The credit crunch and fall in property values meant that some property developers were forced to leave properties in exclusive London streets sitting empty as they waited to either secure funding for construction work or until the market picks up.

Vacancy rates in both residential and commercial properties soared over the course of the economic slowdown.

Another area where legal disputes involving squatters and trespassers have increased is in the area of both private rented accommodation and social housing. As unemployment has risen more tenants have defaulted on rent payments which may see them re-classified as trespassers.

Sweet & Maxwell says that as some workers lost their jobs that provided them with living accommodation as part of their contract— such as caretakers or pub managers/landlords—then legal disputes could also flare up.

Sweet & Maxwell adds that the Government introduced changes in the Land Registration Act 2002 to make it more difficult for squatters to acquire a land title.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

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