

29 January 2016

Auditor General Alar Karis commended on the results of the audit

History and changes in the way of life have left a number of disused buildings all over Estonia. They are not nice to look at and people do not like living in such environments, but the bigger problem is that dilapidated buildings become a danger to people. The exact number of such buildings in Estonia is not known, but the Rescue Board estimates that there were more than 1200 of them in 2015. Uncovered wells, underground tanks and cellars can also become death traps for people in addition to ramshackle buildings.

An abandoned building whose doors and windows have not been locked or boarded up quickly starts attracting homeless people as well as youngsters who have nothing to do. Instead of being ready to promptly react to calls for help, the Rescue Board has to spend a lot of time every year on putting out fires in abandoned buildings. For example, fires had to be put out in an empty schoolhouse in Tallinn more than 30 times in 2014. Last year, four rescue workers were injured when rescuing people from dangerous buildings. Uncovered wells caused the death of six people five years ago. A sad event also occurred in the course of the audit: the National Audit Office pointed out a dangerous building, but the local government failed to see the threat, saying that a manned guard was being used. Despite this, a teenager fell off the third floor of the building and sustained serious injuries.

The local government should have a primary overview of the possible sources of danger in the territory of their city, town or municipality. The audit revealed that this is not the case. It is high time for local governments to change their attitude towards the owners of dilapidated buildings. Moreover, the examples given in the audit report also concern buildings that belong to local governments themselves and should be maintained by them, but instead of performing this duty the local governments have used their money to build new buildings or develop new services.

79 buildings of 15 local governments were inspected during the audit and after the completion of the audit, 55 were still in a dangerous condition, five had been demolished and in 19 cases, the threat had been eliminated in another manner. As for the 59 buildings located on private or state land, the local governments had not reacted to the threat at all in 22 cases, e.g. no proceedings were initiated against the owners of dangerous buildings. It is high time for local governments to acknowledge their responsibility before someone is hurt or killed again.