

SHORT SQUATTING GUIDE ROTTERDAM

Author: KraakSpreekUur (KSU / Squatting Information Hour)

July 2004

Short Squatting Guide Rotterdam V1.1

Available immediately, in virtually all Rotterdam neighborhoods and the entire Netherlands. All kinds of unused floors, houses, buildings and spaces for short or long *legal* living. Suitable for enthusiastic, open minded and social people. No rent, no deposit, no mortgage. A do-it-yourself attitude *is* required. Utilities (gas, water and electricity) are almost always possible. We work without memberships cards or other bureaucratic non-sense. We do help you to help yourself get a suitable home within a few weeks. More information and / or practical help? -> **Come see the KSU!!**

The KraakSpreekUur (KSU / Squatting Information Hour) takes place every Wednesday from 15:00 to 17:00 only. Address: the J.I.P., Mathenesserlaan 173, 3014 HA, Rotterdam. 010-436 25 44.

Hello. This is a short introduction explaining how you can squat a house in Rotterdam. This small guide only outlines the basics if you want more info or have specific questions drop by the KSU. In any case it is always a good idea to get more information. To do this you can also read the (longer) Squatting Guides = 'Kraakhandleidingen' on www.squat.net and check out the links given at the end of this guide. Some of the more (technical) things mentioned in this guide may be a little difficult to follow, the pictures on the frontcover should help. When reading this guide remember that squatting is somewhat different in each city or town.

1. Information Gathering

Getting all the necessary and accurate information on the buildings you may want to squat is ***extremely important***. The KSU almost never gets this info for people, since it does take some time and can in theory be done by anyone. We do know which neighborhoods tend to have more empty houses (not specific houses). We really appreciate it when people tip us off about additional promising areas or houses.

The first step in getting information is searching two or more houses that seem suitable. These houses must be empty ***and unused*** for a year or more. This means that the houses have not been improved or changed (renovation or other construction) and that nobody uses them as a post address or storage address for valuable goods. Even if you are fairly sure of this there are a few things you should always do to double check:

- Talk to 3 or more different neighbors. Do not only ask them about how long it is unused, also ask about the owner, the condition, the plans for the house and the street, etc. Write down anything they might say. Whenever you are getting information or talking to people it really helps to look neat -not like a typical punk/squatter- and to speak good Dutch. Just tell them you are looking for a house, don't mention squatting. Otherwise you may not get the information or even wrong information.

- Look if there is a lot of mail in the hallway / the letterbox, if there is a lot and nobody picks it up this is good sign. Go take a look often, including in the evening (lights). Put a sharpened match between the door and doorframe. If this stays in place, the house is probably not being used. Make sure you also check the house the night before you squat.
- Look through the windows and check if there is a lot of dust on the windowsill, check if there are cobwebs between the door and doorframe or “fake” curtains.
- Someone who speaks good Dutch should call the Eneco* (electricity company) and ask when the power was cut off. You may have to call 2 or more times and talk to a few different people/make up a likely excuse before you get this information. If the electricity was cut off more than a year ago this is a good sign, if it was not cut off at all this is not necessarily bad.

Except for the Eneco it is essential to go by organizations in person rather than calling for information. If you do have trouble with calling the Eneco pay them a visit as well.

- The next important step is finding out who the owner of the house is. The City Informatie Centrum (CIC) have some very useful and free information. You must go see them in person.

When you go to the CIC show them your squat address and tell them you would like a print out with information about the owner and such. Officially you can only get one address at a time for free but you can go with a few people or come back again. Don't tell them you plan to squat, say you want the information because you want to contact the owner to rent or possibly buy the place or make up another good excuse.

Next also say you want to know if building, renovation or demolition permits have been applied for and / or issued for your houses. (Bouw, renovatie of sloopvergunningen aangevraagd en / of afgegeven.) Again –only if asked why- make up a believable excuse: say you live in the area and heard some rumors and want to know for sure. If permits have been applied for or given you need to know when they were applied for and when they plan to do something in or with the house. There is not much point in squatting a house that will certainly be torn down in 2 months... Especially since a judge and possibly the police will almost always favor the owner if he has concrete plans he can prove with documents. When you ask about these permits it is quite likely they will give you a number and a time to call about them or send you to one of their specialized workers (bouwinspecteur). That's even better, make sure you call the bouwinspecteur.

When you ask at the CIC who the owner is (print-out) they may say you must identify yourself because the owner is private and not an organization. If this happens don't tell them your name or other details! In this situation the best thing to do is just say “nevermind, thank you” and then –*if* you want to squat from a private owner- go the Kadaster (see below). This organization does not ask you to identify yourself but will usually charge you about 8 Euro for their information. If the owner is private you can still get information about permits at the CIC without having to tell them anything about yourself. Permits are public information no matter who owns the house. Finally

at the Kamer Van Koophandel (see phonebook) you can find out when a company moved out of a building and where to. Even though getting information is not difficult no matter who the owner is the KSU usually advises people to squat from 'woningbouwverenigingen' (housing councils) rather than companies or even less desirable, private owners. If you are not sure you can check in the gray phonebook if the organization you are dealing with is a council. The reason why squatting from councils is better is that they are very unlikely to do anything illegal (intimidation, violence, eviction) unlike companies or private owners. Since the majority of (empty) houses in Rotterdam is owned by councils it only makes sense for inexperienced squatters to squat them first unless they are very prepared and very motivated.

It is always a good idea to pay a visit to the KSU and ask about a particular house, we *may* know something about the owner, house or area that could help you a lot.

2. Other Preparation

Never squat alone or with few people (7 or 8 is o.k. for a small apartment or house, more for bigger or special buildings) discuss and plan things well. Make sure that a good number of people can actually stay around the clock for a day or two. At least one person should speak good Dutch. Gather the following stuff in advance:

- A functional/symbolic "squat set" for each house or floor you will squat, a squat set is: a small chair, a small table, an air-mattress and a sleeping bag. Folding or camping stuff is best for a squat set since it is small and light.
- A suitable lock and good tools.
- Old Stuff (shirts, vases, candles etc) to put in the window so the place looks lived in.

Buy a lock of the same type as is already on the door. If the lock is of the 'oplegslot' type, a good and cheap brand is Benco, E 20,- for sale in very few places, De Jong IJzerhandel (hardware store) often has them. Don't get cheaper / other brands as they are either awful quality or double the cost.

If there is only one lock of the oplegslot type on the door you will need at the very least the following tools for breaking open the door and mounting the lock successfully:

- 2 good crowbars, hammer, new lock, temporary lock (two thick eyelet screws and a padlock), good (pozidrive) screws in sizes, 4.5 * 30, 4.5 * 45, 4.5 * 60mm, about 16 of each, screwdrivers in all the common shapes and sizes. Old flat screwdrivers, a few small pieces of cardboard from a box -can help when putting on the new lock-, a wood chisel about 1.5 cm wide, a battery powdered drill (can be rented!) and mobile phones with plenty of battery and credit!

If the lock is of the "profielcilinder" type pay especial attention to the metal plating (beslag) around it. How thick is it, of what material is it made, how is it attached. How far does the cylinder stick out? Are there any brands or stars printed on the material? For a replacement profielcilinder "Corben" is the only brand worth buying (cheap and good quality). It is always a good idea to push on the door at various heights. By feeling and observing how much the door 'gives' you can see which locks are actually locked and to some extent whether the door will be difficult or not. Always

check if there is a so-called anti-inbraakstrip mounted. Taking digital pictures of the door and lock is also good. You can always show the print outs to the KSU. We have special tools and other gear which make getting in a much easier, these can be borrowed. We do ask a deposit (new value of tools and gear) and the tools must be returned very quickly and in good condition or else we may be forced to buy new ones.

- Write the letters to the owner and the neighborhood (see below), make sure you have the correct address and phone so you can reach the owner quickly.
- When you go squatting take all the papers you have gotten from gathering information and any legal papers you may have (see below).

3. The Squatting Itself

Make sure nobody in the group has any form of identification (not even membership cards or pieces of paper). Agree beforehand which alias –fake name- everyone will use. As a general rule you should never give your name to the owner –doing so will make it easier for him to take (legal) action- or the police.

When squatting find the quickest and quietest way to get in with the least damage (the back, the roof, the garden, the basement, a sliding window). If these are not good options you can break open the front door. This is a bit more risky, you will need people keeping an eye out. Although living in a squat is totally legal damaging a door, lock etc. is not. It is a very minor crime so be quick and neat. Good tools, technical insight, steady nerves and cooperation are essential when getting in.

Squatted!:

When the door is open let everyone and set up the squat set real quick. It is best that the squat set is visible from the street. In the meantime barricade your door and / or replace the lock **fast**. The cheapest and quickest barricade is a beam of wood (about 120 * 8 * 4 or thicker) and two small but thick pieces of wood (15 * 8 * 4) with four screw holes each. As soon as the door is open and the squat set is on the way you mount the first small board on the door about 7 cm below the lock. Then you mount the second one on the floor making sure that you jam the beam tight between the two small boards. If the 8 or more screws you used are thick and long, the fit is tight and the beam is at about a 45 degree angle you should have a door that is hard to open from the outside. With a functioning barricade you can put a lookout just outside the door and work on replacing the lock. At the first sign of trouble you can very quickly and solidly jam the door shut with the beam.

About 65% of the doors have so called ‘oplegslot met vaste cylinder’. Once the door is open you can remove the both parts of the lock by unscrewing 8 screws. It takes a bit of practice to be able to mount the new lock quickly. Practicing on the door of some friends first might be a good idea. When buying the lock you should know on which side the lock is as seen from the street;

Lock is on left : you will need a lock for a ‘rechtsdraaiende deur’.
Lock is on right : you will need a lock for a ‘linksdraaiende deur’.

Dealing with the police and owner

Don't be intimidated by police or the owner. If you don't want them to come in they may not do so legally unless the police has special permission and a document called a 'last tot binnentreden'. Very important, before you squat surf to:

www.rhizomes.nl/Laws_Wetgeving.html

This page consists of the most important laws that apply to squatting. Print this out, read and understand it. It is in Dutch but ***having this on you when you squat can often make all the difference between being illegally evicted or keeping your new home.***

If at all possible squat during the week, Fridays and the weekend stink because you will almost certainly not be able to reach a buurtagent or the owner. In other words you may have to hang around the empty squat for days in relative insecurity...

Someone who is Dutch or speaks perfect Dutch should calmly explain the situation to the police. This way the police will hopefully think all the people are Dutch. If you are not Dutch and don't speak good Dutch it is best not to say anything to them since if they figure out you are "foreign" you are legally required to identify yourself if asked. Remember: failing to do so is theoretically enough for them to arrest you, perhaps even deport you if you are not from the EU! Even so, foreigners should not carry papers when squatting either. If the police don't have a good reason to believe you are foreign (accent!) they may not indefinitely assume you are.

You do not have to explain to the police how you got in, it is best to politely refuse to say anything about this or to say the door / window was open. Whatever you do, do not admit to damaging anything.

There used to be a rule that you could be evicted within the first 24 hours of squatting a house. This rule no longer applies and you have the right to live in a house and are protected from the moment you set up your squat set and close the door behind you with a new lock. The police is sometimes behind the times and may not know this rule has changed. If they ask about how long you have been in the squat just tell them you have been there for more than 24 hours and show them the legal papers (from the internet site) to explain that it is actually not even relevant anymore.

You can, but don't have to, let one or two (no more!) policemen in to check that the place is truly empty (Leegstand constateren). This may sometimes be useful, if a policeman comes in write down the name or policenumber of the policeman. Then when the owner or other police drop by and start being difficult you can refer them to this policeman. Make sure you that for the first 1-2 days or so there are enough people in the squat. This is more fun and handy if the police or owner should "visit". The more people the less likely they will try to talk or throw you out (=illegal).

Some owners (in particular private owners) have been known to send around some big friends or construction workers who want to throw you out or trash the place. This is rare but if it happens don't let them in and call the police. After all you have a right to be there and they ***should*** offer you protection. However, the police does not always do that which they should.

If the owner has or pretends to have a plan with the house he will let you know. Probably through a letter saying that you must leave within so many days. You don't have to worry too much about this letter and others like it. But *if* a special paper which summons you to court arrives, you must decide if you will leave or try to win in court. The owner will have to prove in court that he really has plans. Courtcases – which are usually in the form of a so-called 'kort geding'- can be and are won by squatters. Going to court does sometimes cost you money but not necessarily a lot. The KSU can help you with this as they have some legal knowledge and a lawyer that may be able to help.

The KSU usually suggests writing a polite letter -we have examples- to the owner before the actual squatting. In this letter you can offer to pay (a low) rent. If you have this letter ready you can deliver it in person to the owner right after you have spoken to the police. The sooner you do this, the sooner you will know how the owner feels about the squatting. You almost never end up paying rent since this gives you even more rights and the owner many responsibilities but the important thing is to offer it. Often the owners will want to offer you an 'om-niet-contract' (also called 'anti-kraak' or 'tijdelijke verhuur'). 9 out of 10 times this is a bad contract which is usually only in the interest of the owner. In practice it means –among other shitty things- that he can kick you out whenever he wants with little notice. There are very few cases in which considering signing such a contract might be o.k. Come by the KSU with the contract if you have any doubts at all.

If the police doesn't show up right after you have everyone and everything inside as well as the lock mounted you can go talk to them yourself. The KSU does this 90% of the time since it offers a few advantages in most situations.

Two persons –the rest should stay in the house- can go to the nearest police station and talk to a 'buurtagent' (neighborhood police) and explain the situation. This type of police is usually much friendlier and social to squatters than normal police. Also it gives you a good opportunity to explain that you have squatted the place legally and that you are nice people that will improve the house and neighborhood. Compare this to a panicked neighbor or the owner calling the police and saying "Junkies have broken into the house and it sounds like they are trashing the place"... The reaction of the police will be totally different and it is very likely that the outcome will be different as well. In other words if at all possible make sure the police comes in to the picture when you are expecting them and while you are with many people. This makes things easier and safer for you.

You can ask the buurtagent to make a 'mutatie'. This is an official police record in the computer which in the future you may be able to use as proof that you did squat the house and that it was empty when you did. So whenever possible ask the buurtagent for the 'mutatienummer' plus his name or number and write it down together with the date. Before you find a buurtagent on duty which is willing to make a mutatie you may need to go to 2 or even 3 police stations or try again the next day.

On rare occasions people get arrested because of squatting. When this happens the police will almost never keep you for long, but only if you do not say anything and there is no way for them to find out your identity! If this is the case a couple of hours or a day is usually the longest time you will spend in a cell. When you are arrested by

the police you can often assume they will say almost anything (yes, they lie often and without shame) to find out who you are and what you did. Do not say or sign anything. If they say they can 'keep you for weeks' and that 'you are in a lot of trouble because you were breaking in', and that 'your friends already told us' don't believe and don't answer them in any shape or form. Not speaking will NOT result in a criminal record while speaking may give a lot of problems!

4. Other concerns after you squat

To get into contact with the neighborhood, you can make a letter in which you: explain why you squatted, tell them in which house you're living and that they are welcome to have some coffee in your new house etc. The KSU has some examples of these letters. Being and remaining considerate to the neighborhood is a good idea, the more people are with you the better.

If you have money for gas and electricity (water is usually connected) you have to call the Eneco again. Not paying for utilities is usually a very bad idea. Your pipes and wires must be in good working order before they will connect you. If gas and electricity are still connected you can call and ask them to send you a transfer form (overschrijvingformulier). On this simple form you will usually have to fill in that you did not know the previous user –most likely with an empty building- if they then put the contract on your name it will only cost you E 13.45,-.

Connecting the power and gas if they are turned off will require an appointment with an Eneco worker, this will cost you E 39.95,-. After this your monthly cost will usually be between E 70,- and E 150,- for a floor or small house. Check with the Eneco. The Eneco will always connect the television cable (costs about E 12,- / month) when they connect the other utilities **unless** you specifically ask them **not** to. Getting a phone or Internet connection is no problem. Call the appropriate companies such as KPN and Chello.

Summing up:

1. First spot a few empty and unused houses.
2. Get **all the necessary and reliable** information about the buildings.
3. Get all your gear and legal papers in order and ask plenty of people to help.
4. Squat, set up squat set, mount barricade / new lock, clean up.
5. If you decide to notify police, neighbors and owners of your presence do so as quickly and friendly as possible.

5. Information about the KSU Rotterdam

If you really can not drop by the KSU (this is always better) you can also call or mail: rotterdam@jip.org. Bear in mind this mail is not checked very often.

There are a few experienced squatters in Rotterdam that the KSU knows. These people often help with the practical side of squatting. They function as a "breaking crew", mount locks and talk to the police & owner. These people have a lot of tools and will usually increase the chance of success greatly. They do not ask for money but appreciate any donations very much. However these people do have a few

requirements before they will consider helping out:

1. You must have **all** the information gathered in the way that is explained in this guide.
2. You must have this information on **two** squatable houses that are suited to your needs and be willing to make good agreements / appointments with them. For example these people expect you to be on time and sober!
3. You must be willing to take financial responsibility for their tools and gear unless you really have no money.
4. Expect to have to wait before these people can help you. Remember these people are strictly volunteer and have private lives. It may take five days or eight weeks before they can help you, depending on the circumstances.
5. Some information for non-European Union people

Squatting always comes with a relatively small risk of getting into trouble with the police or the law. As explained before for people that are not from Europe the risks are a fair bit higher since with a “foreigner” status you have fewer rights and are often “illegal”. This does not mean that you can not or should not squat. Non-EU people have and do squat in Rotterdam. It does mean you have to be very careful, prepare very well and try hard to get some Dutch people to help you.

6. The links below are a treasure trove of information! Especially if you follow the various links to for example “kraakhandleidingen” and the many questions & answers.

WWW.RHIZOMES.NL, our own website, lots of additional info.

WWW.SQUAT.NET, lots of info on everything related to squatting.

WWW.KRAKENPOST.NL, here you can read news and pose questions about squatting. Check the rules, read the manuals and previous posts first!

WWW.KRAAK-FORUM.TK, similar to KRAKENPOST, great answers to lots of common questions. Again, read and check before you post questions.

WWW.KRAKENDROTTERDAM.ORG

Final Note: Living in a squat is legal and often means a very cheap, quick way of housing yourself and possibly friends for weeks, months or years -depends on situation and on you-. Compare that with the three year waiting list for an expensive rental and draw your own conclusions.

KraakSpreekUur (KSU / Squatting Information Hour), July 2004



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/fr/deed.fr>