



## **Empty homes are costing you thousands**

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Ryan Kruger, WINK News Call for Action

FORT MYERS, Fla. - It's your money, and you're paying for thousands of empty buildings across the country and here in Southwest Florida. It's costing you billions of dollars every year.

WINK News Call For Action spent months pouring through tax records and uncovered more than 20 government-owned properties in Lee County that are sitting empty. Many have been that way for years.

The quiet Cypress Villages, Coronado Moors neighborhood in South Fort Myers is a little too quiet. There are eight empty homes in this neighborhood that you're paying for.

"To me it's the biggest waste of taxpayers' money that I could imagine," said Herb Taylor, President of the Housing Association.

"These homes are just sitting like that it just...really galls me."

The Coast Guard bought eight homes in the neighborhood off Winkler Road in 1977. They were originally intended to house Coast Guard Members stationed at Fort Myers Beach.

Today, those homes are empty. The Coast Guard is getting them ready for the auction block, but officials couldn't provide us with an exact date of when that will happen.

"We've got 8 houses here that are belonging to the government, to the coast guard, and they're not using them," Taylor said, "if that's not a waste I don't know what is."

This is hardly the only neighborhood with empty government owned homes. WINK News Call For Action found 21 vacant properties just in Lee County that are owned by the federal government.

Not only are you paying for the upkeep on these homes, but because they are owned by the federal government that means no one is paying any property taxes.

Based on a conservative estimate of the property taxes that you would have to pay, we found that taxpayers missed out on \$31,580 in 2013. Keep in mind you've been paynig for some of these

homes for decades.

The White House says government owned buildings are costing you billions of dollars every year. An interactive map on the government website shows more than 14,000 buildings that the White Says are wasteful. Including more than 500 in Florida. According to the government site, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

"All the studies have shown that vacant homes in a neighborhood have a detrimental effect. They're broken-in more, they're vandalized. Sometimes there are squatters," said Attorney Kevin Jursinski.

Jursinski specializes in real estate and foreclosure law. We talked to him about what empty homes mean to the people who live in those neighborhoods.

"The person who is next door is affected, even though they've been paying their mortgage and maintaining their house, just the neighborhood effect has a drop in value," Jursinski said.

Two years ago the White House crafted legislation to make it easier to sell empty government properties. That bill has never left committee.