

DAC Guidance Notes: Safety and Security

These guidelines cover general information regarding Health and Safety (H&S) issues, Fire Safety Regulations, dealing with asbestos, maintaining electrical wiring and keeping your church secure.

Health and Safety

The [Ecclesiastical Insurance Group \(EIG\)](#) has produced extensive guidance notes to help Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) manage H&S issues in their churches, which can be found here:

[Ecclesiastical Insurance Group: Guidance Notes - Church Health and Safety](#)

The following resources are also available for general guidance:

[Churchcare: Health and Safety in Churches](#)

[ChurchSafety: Health and Safety in UK Places of Worship](#)

In general, each PCC should appoint a Health and Safety Sub-Committee and record one member as having specific responsibility for H&S. Places of worship are not exempt from H&S legislation. Environmental Health Officers enforce this legislation in places of worship under Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1998, since the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 imposes a duty on persons who have control of premises to ensure that the premises, means of access, and any plant or substance in the premises, are safe and without risk to health. From May-04, these duties extended to the handling of asbestos and management of related risks.

[UK Legislation: The Health and Safety \(Enforcing Authority\) Regulations 1998](#)

[UK Legislation: Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#)

The Health Act 2006 makes it an offence to smoke in a public place, and to fail to prevent smoking in a public space from happening. So, persons who control (or are concerned with the management of) premises considered to be a public space must stop any person who is smoking there from doing so. Many church premises, and certainly all places of worship, have always been smoke-free. However, churches may have control over places such as halls and smoking in them must now be prevented. PCCs must ensure that compliant no-smoking signs are displayed. Enforcement is carried out by Local Authorities, which the Department of Health are encouraging to employ a light touch.

This Act should not prevent the burning of incense in churches, as it applies mainly to lit tobacco.

[UK Legislation: Health Act 2006](#)

Fire Safety Regulations in places of worship

Under The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 a “responsible person”, which can be the PCC, must carry out a risk assessment of their premises and have thought about how to ensure evacuation in the event of a fire.

[UK Legislation: The Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)

[Communities and Local Government: Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005 - A short guide to making your premises safe from fire](#)

Risk assessment, and whether you need to plan escape routes or have fire-detection/fighting equipment, is explained here:

[Communities and Local Government: Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Small and Medium Places of Assembly](#)

Further guidance on regulations, including action points for those responsible for ‘employees’ (paid or voluntary) who use or pass through any part of the church building (shop, office, worship spaces) on their way to/from work can be found here:

[West Midlands Fire Service: Business Fire Safety](#)

The Fire Service are perhaps the best interpreter of fire safety requirements and may be willing to visit to advise on needs for emergency lighting, signage, etc., which are not mandatory in churches.

Risks from asbestos in churches

[UK Legislation: The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006](#)

The 2006 Regulations’ principal focus is the duty to manage asbestos in non-domestic premises, including churches. Since 2004, those having control of non-domestic premises have a duty to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of whether asbestos is, or is liable to be, present.

In making the assessment, this ‘duty-holder’ must:

- take steps that are reasonable in the circumstances;
- consider the condition of any asbestos which is, or is assumed to be, present in the premises;
- take account of building plans and other relevant information, and of the age of the premises;
- inspect (or have inspected) parts of the premises that are reasonably accessible;
- review the assessment if there is reason to suspect that it is no longer valid, or the building has been altered.

Where the assessment shows that asbestos is present, or is liable to be present, the ‘duty-holder’ must:

- determine the risk from that asbestos;
- prepare a written plan to identify the parts of the premises concerned;
- prepare measures for managing the risk;
- ensure that measures specified in the plan shall be adequate for monitoring condition and guaranteeing proper maintenance or removal, and ensure that information about the location and condition of asbestos is provided to every person liable to disturb it, and to the Emergency Services;
- record the measures taken to implement the plan, and review it at regular intervals.

The vast majority of Church of England churches were either constructed or restored before asbestos was used in construction, so the overall risk will not be as high as for other classes of building. However, some churches do contain asbestos, usually in connection with 20th Century extensions or alterations, such as heating systems, pipe lagging, organ blowers or roofing materials. As such, it is important that the response matches the risk. Guidance on reporting discovered asbestos can be found here:

[West Midlands Fire Service: Asbestos Reporting](#)

Electrical wiring in churches

Despite increasingly high standards of installation, numerous church fires can be attributed to faulty electric wiring or apparatus. It is therefore important that electricity should be treated with respect, and a 100mA/100ms Residual Current Device should be fitted between the meter and the main distribution board.

All electric wiring should be installed in accordance with the Wiring Regulations issued by the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) under British Standard 7671:2008 and any subsequent amendments.

[Institution of Electrical Engineers: Wiring Regulations](#)

Work on the electrical system/installation in churches should be undertaken only by electrical contractors enrolled with the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC), the Electrical Contractors Association (ECA), or the National Association of Professional Inspectors and Testers (NAPIT).

The NICEIC carries out periodical and random inspections of contractors' work; the contractor would be liable for any remedial measures required to make good faulty work.

The Church Buildings Council (CBC) recommends that churches have their electrical installations inspected and tested every five years. The inspection and testing should be carried out in accordance with IEE Wiring Regulations 712 and 713, and an inspection certificate should be obtained in every case.

The main switchgear in the church should be labelled to show:

- the date of the most recent inspection;
- the date of the recommended future inspection;

- the circuit supplied by subsequent MCBs/fuses.

The PCC should ensure that a thorough physical examination of all portable appliances is conducted regularly to ensure that worn flexes, broken plugs, sockets, etc. are replaced immediately.

Church security

These simple pointers may be useful when a PCC is considering improving security:

- Tell Police and Fire Services who to contact in an emergency to gain access to the church, and which are your preferred points of forced entry if they cannot wait for a keyholder to arrive.
- Agree who telephones whom, and in what sequence, when something suspicious is seen, and how to pass warnings to neighbouring parishes if culprits are likely to move on. In other words, operate a 'Neighbourhood Watch' for churches.
- Use planting schemes to make access over walls and fences difficult, and consider minor adjustment to walls and ledges to remove hand or footholds. Place furnishings, plants, or other appropriate objects on the inside of windows to make dropping down to the floor awkward if entry were gained.
- Put away garden tools when not in use, and remove any other objects around the church building that could be easily usable as projectiles. Never leave ladders easily accessible.
- Improve exterior lighting and consider the use of automatically activated internal lights or recorded sound as a deterrent.
- Increase the use of the premises, or spread activities as widely as practicable to try and avoid long stretches of inactivity in the building.
- Consider CCTV with movement-triggered video-recording.
- Do not ring-fence your church unless vandalism or attack is a severe or persistent problem. If this does become necessary, strong wooden fencing with pales stapled with a continuous run of wire may give a less unwelcoming impression than sharp-topped metal fencing. Further information can be found here:

[Churchcare: Security](#)