

# Church SAFETY

## ChurchSafety InfoSheet: Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment is perhaps the most important part of Health and Safety because it allows you to find out about what could cause harm to people in your Church or Place of Worship.

Treat it as a fact-finding exercise, which can then be used to help you reduce the risks in the building.

The simplest form is known as the "Five Steps" method, which is perfectly adequate for use by Places of Worship. The Five Steps are:

1. Look for the hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed
3. Evaluate the risks
4. Record the findings
5. Review and revise

*An example Risk Assessment can be found later on in this InfoSheet.*

### Look for the hazards

Hazards are those things in and around the Place of Worship that could cause harm to staff, volunteers, visitors and other members of the public. They can be building structures, fitting and fixtures, equipment and tools or any other item that in on the premises.

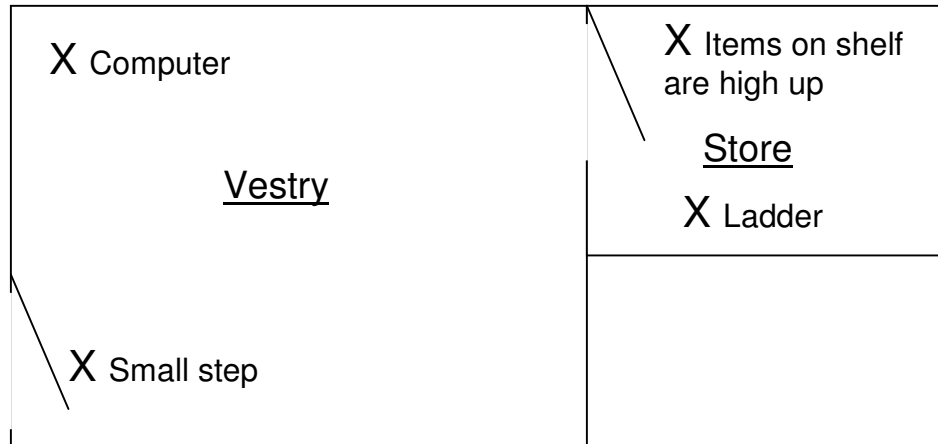
Hazards can range from items that could cause someone to slip, trip or fall, things that get hot that could burn, electrical hazards and hazards from equipment such as display screens. Chemical safety is considered using a different method that looks at each substance separately, but you need to think about this too.

Look around the building to find those things that you consider being a significant hazard. You need to look in parts of the premises you don't often use such as boiler rooms, store rooms and towers as well as the parts of the building you use regularly. Look outside the building and see if there are any hazards that could affect people, including members of the public.

It is easy to overlook some hazards because they are familiar. You might use a piece of equipment without thinking twice or you might walk past a trailing cable without a second thought. Think about things carefully to make sure you don't ignore something that is a significant hazard.

It is useful to use a floor plan of the building and simply mark on it where each hazard is. The plan only needs to be a simple sketch of each floor level if the building is on more than one level. Simply mark a cross on the plan where the hazard is, and write next to it a brief description of the hazard.

The plan below is an example showing only a Vestry and a small storage room leading off.



Tip:

The plan need only be a simple sketch of the floor layout of the building. It is only a reference and is not a legally required part of the assessment.

It is also useful to ask people that use the premises if they know of anything that they consider being a significant hazard. Perhaps something is regularly causing minor injuries or near misses, so look in accident and incident books.

Also consider those people that work away from the building, for example for pastoral visits. These people might be at risk from direct contact with other people, who might be (in some cases) of a violent disposition.

A Risk Assessment needs to be carried out to cover all events, activities and buildings should have a Risk Assessment applicable to them.

## Decide who might be harmed

Consider the people that use the building and how the hazard could affect them. While some parts of the building might be open to the public on a regular basis, other areas might only be used by one or two people on an occasional basis.

Some people might be at more risk than others. Consider the needs of disabled people and the elderly in the Risk Assessment. Also, take into consideration things that could pose a significant risk to young children or babies or new and expectant mothers. People like Church Sitters and Caretakers usually work by themselves, so consider these people as being at significant risk.

Most of the people who use a Church or Place of Worship must be thought of as members of the public, even if they worship there every week. It is not likely that these people would have had any training or instruction on safety issues and this must be considered in the Risk Assessment too.

It is also important to consider how the hazard could cause an injury. The hazard could affect people in different ways depending on what the people do, so carefully consider these activities in the building.

## Evaluate the risk

Risk is the chance that someone could be harmed. It is useful to categorise them as "Low", "Medium" or "High" for convenience.

As you evaluate the risk, think about those things that are already in place to reduce the risk. Do they comply with current codes of practice (such as the Church Safety Code of Best Practice) and regulations? If they do not reduce the risk to a low level, think about what else you could do.

As a guide, "Low" risks do not need any significant attention (but do not rule out making any improvements). "Medium" risks need some attention to try to bring them to a "Low" level. "High" risks should be prioritised as needing improvement to bring them down to a "Low" level. Avoid the temptation of making all risks "Low" as this can hide those things that need attention.

High risk	There is a high chance of an injury (which is likely to be serious) and more must be done.
Medium risk	There could be an injury and improvements should be made.
Low risk	There is little chance of there being an injury. Little extra needs to be done.

The additional measures you put into place need not be complex. Most of the time it is just a case of making some simple changes that should not cost anything. Consider some of the below:

- Not using extension leads if possible
- Reducing the number of chairs stacked one on top of another
- Locking away dangerous equipment and chemicals
- Making sure that carpets are not damaged and mats are secured down
- Displaying a warning sign in the porch to inform visitors of the uneven floor
- Using a portable "wet floor" sign during cleaning
- Moving a microphone cable away from a step
- Inspecting furniture, memorials and headstones routinely.

There are additional precautions needed for fire safety, including fire extinguishers, exit signs and possibly fire alarms.

### Record findings

Risk Assessment is a legal requirement and you might need to prove that you have done a Risk Assessment in the future. Risk Assessments must be written down if you have five or more employees, and in Churches and Places of Worship, this usually includes volunteers. In all cases, it is recommended that the Risk Assessment be written down.

The Risk Assessments should be dated and preferably signed then filed somewhere safe for future reference. The Risk Assessments you have would be used when writing a Health and Safety Policy and you should refer to them regularly.

### Review and revise

Risk Assessments should be reviewed occasionally to ensure that they remain valid. For most Places of Worship, a review every 12 months should be adequate.

If you have never done a Risk Assessment before, it is a good idea to review them in about six months time as you are likely to be more able to spot hazards and make a judgement about the risk.

If there are significant changes, the Risk Assessment might need to be reviewed and this should be seen as part of the planning process of any new project or change.

Each time you review and revise your Risk Assessment, you are likely to identify new hazards, think of new control measures and make further improvements. Always aim to make improvements.

### Advanced methods

There are many different Risk Assessment systems in use. Some of these use scoring systems and often consider more specific details about the hazard. These techniques can be very useful for evaluating larger Places of Worship but are best used by those more experienced in Risk Assessment.

Numeric or Quantitative Risk Assessment techniques are useful where the traditional "Low", "Medium" and "High" scoring system is not adequate. A number of methods can be used, but again these are best left to those more experienced in Risk Assessment.

### Downloaded or Copied Risk Assessments

On some Websites, it is possible to download Risk Assessments. These Risk Assessments can be useful for research, but must not be used as the Risk Assessment in your Church or Place of Worship as they do not comply with the regulations for Risk Assessments.

Every Church or Place of Worship is required by law to do a Risk Assessment – you need to think about the hazards in your own building and on the activities that you carry out. Every Church or Place of Worship is different – different buildings, different congregations, different safety precautions etc... One glove does not fit all hands.

Some Church organisations provide Risk Assessment forms for use in their buildings. These should be regarded as a Generic Risk Assessment, and must be used to accompany your own Risk Assessment unless there is enough space to add your own Risk Assessment details.

## Risk Assessment Example

1. List the significant hazards in the Church or Place of Worship (including the grounds if you have any).	2. List the people who are at risk from the hazard (don't forget to show where disabled, elderly or young children are at risk).	3. Evaluate the risk. Decide what is being done / can be done to reduce or remove the risk.
<p><i>Loose floor covering in back room. Fitted carpet lifting in places</i></p> <p><i>Wiring causing electric shock</i></p> <p><i>Chemicals stored in the Kitchen</i></p>	<p><i>Sunday School - young children, 50+ people in total</i></p> <p><i>All people who use the building</i></p> <p><i>5 people use the kitchen but children sometimes go in too.</i></p>	<p><i>Medium Risk: children run about sometimes</i></p> <p><i>Some areas of carpet newly stuck down with carpet tape. Need to tape down or fix remainder and inspect occasionally. Long-term, carpet to be repaired.</i></p> <p><i>Low Risk</i></p> <p><i>RCD (trip switch) fitted, wiring tested every year and recent wiring / corrective works.</i></p> <p><i>High Risk: Children can get access to chemicals like bleach and there have been cases where children have been playing with them in the past.</i></p> <p><i>Lock cupboard and improve supervision.</i></p>

A blank Risk Assessment form like this one is available on the ChurchSafety Website <http://www.churchsafety.org.uk/>

## **Produced by ChurchSafety**

*Improving the understanding of Health and Safety in UK Places of Worship*

**[www.churchsafety.org.uk](http://www.churchsafety.org.uk)**

### **Need further help?**

You can get advice about Health and Safety from your Environmental Health Department, which is part of your local District or Borough Council and fire safety advice is available from your local Fire Brigade.

If you are part of a larger organisation, there is usually someone you can contact to get advice and information from.

*This leaflet has been produced for general information only. No liability is accepted for the content and the way that you use the information.*

*© 2009 ChurchSafety – you may freely copy this leaflet in full for non-commercial purposes.*

***This leaflet was distributed by:***