

Church SAFETY

ChurchSafety InfoSheet: Starting Off

Where do I start?
What do I have to do?
What equipment do I need?

If you are new to Health and Safety, it can be hard to decide exactly where to start in your Church or Place of Worship.

The number of topics and the issues that need to be considered can seem bewildering, but take time to plan and think through what you need to do first.

Health and Safety is about reducing the chance of someone being harmed. It is not about eliminating risk, but controlling it. Risk Assessment is central to Health and Safety and is a requirement of the law. Risk Assessment should be used in every stage of the process in one form or another.

Churches and Places of Worship vary in size from small to very large, from a single room to a large building with many rooms. The people that use the premises could be very young, very old, disabled or have other needs that need to be taken into consideration.

Every situation is different and the needs of every congregation vary.

There is no instant answer or tick-list. Health and Safety is about the way in which you manage risks in **your** situation.

Suggestion on how to get started

The following is a guideline on how to start in your own Church or Place of Worship:

1. Start by planning. Decide how much time you have and who will be involved. Don't let this stage take too much time, however, as you need to start on the important work as soon as possible.
2. Consider setting up some kind of committee. This would usually be about six people who should reflect the mix of people and activities in your Church or Place of Worship.

3. Do an initial audit. Look for the various issues in your Church or Place of Worship, again writing them down. Most of the issues you will already know about - you might also know how to fix them instantly, even if only as a temporary measure. A self-assessment audit questionnaire form is available as a download to Members.

Initial Audit - some of the items to consider:

- Is there a first aid kit and are the contents in date?
- Do you have fire extinguishers? Are these serviced?
- Do you have a fire alarm and is this tested regularly?
- Are there any hazards or issues you know about?
- Is there anything that has caused an accident, fire or near miss in the last 12 months?

4. Set out a plan to correct as many of the items from the initial audit. Some items will need immediate action while others can be put off for some time (but not for ever!). Consider items as high risk, medium risk and low risk for completion within 1 month (for high risk), 3 months (for medium risk) or 1 year (for low risk).
5. Ensure you have the basic equipment in place. Please see the list below.
6. Do a more thorough and complete Risk Assessment. Additional forms and resources are available as downloads to Members.
7. Start writing a Health and Safety Policy. A starter document is available as a download to Members.
8. Discuss any issues with others who use the building - from members of your congregation who might lead a group (such as a choirmaster) or people from outside groups that use the building. Let them know what you are doing and ask them if they have any issues they would like to see addressed.
9. Work through the topics listed on the Information section of the ChurchSafety Website one by one (<http://www.churchsafety.org.uk/>). This will need some additional Risk Assessments. Make any changes to the Policy that are necessary as you work through this stage and consider any additional training needs (such as a first aid course).
10. Repeat the Risk Assessment process and continue reviewing your Health and Safety procedures. Ensure you keep doing the audit reviews and continue improving Health and Safety. Keep up-to-date with new regulations and guidelines.

Write as much as you can down. In some situations, it might not be a legal requirement to have written Risk Assessments and a written Policy but. However, It is useful to have these documents in writing for reference or if an inspector should call as you can prove that you are moving in the right direction, even if you are not doing everything quite yet.

You won't be able to do everything immediately. Break it down and plan carefully - perhaps aim to take on one topic per month. The way in which you prioritise is up to you and should reflect those things you feel are most important in your situation, but every topic needs to be considered in time.

Basic equipment you must have

The list below would usually be the minimum equipment needed in any Church or Place of Worship. In some situations, additional equipment is also essential, such as an electrical fire alarm, smoke detectors or emergency lighting. It is also essential to maintain this equipment (such as checking that the first aid kit has not been used).

The basic equipment needed in every Church or Place of Worship includes:

1. A first aid kit and an accident book
2. Fire extinguishers
3. Exit signs
4. Health and Safety Law poster
5. Health and Safety Policy Statement
6. Fire Action poster

The guidelines in this InfoSheet are a recommendation on how to start managing Health and Safety in a Church or Place of Worship. In some situations, the methods listed might need to be modified

Produced by ChurchSafety

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

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.

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