

Church SAFETY

ChurchSafety InfoSheet:

New Fire Regulations

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005



New Fire Regulations are being brought in that affect all Churches and Places of Worship.



All Places of Worship must now comply.
The deadline was October 2006.



Unlike all previous regulations, it does not matter if people are employed or how many people attend.
As long as the building is used, the regulations apply.



Fire is common in Churches and Places of worship – an estimated 1000 happen every year in England and Wales, some 200 of which are arson.
All of these could be avoided.



For many Places of Worship, there will be little extra that needs to be done, especially where there has been compliance with the Fire Precautions (Workplaces) Regulations.

So what do the new Regulations mean?

This leaflet has been written to guide you through the most important parts of the new rules.

The deadline for compliance was October 2006.

Fire Regulations

The new fire regulations are known as The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. They came into force October 2006.

The regulations affect all buildings that are in use and this includes Churches and other Places of Worship (but it does not cover domestic buildings and a number of other exceptions). It replaces the old fire regulations and 'Fire Certificates'.

The duty is on the 'Responsible Person', which in the case of a Church or Place of Worship, would usually be the most senior clergy or religious leader. In some cases, this responsibility might fall to paid personnel who manage the premises or the person who has taken on the running of the Place of Worship if there is no paid religious leader.

The Responsible Person must do whatever you can to reduce the risk of fire, using Risk Assessment. If fire does start, you need to have adequate precautions to put out or control the fire, raise the alarm and make sure that people can evacuate the building safely and quickly.

The rest of the InfoSheet discusses some of the most important facts about these topics.

Fire Prevention and Fire Risk Assessment

Perhaps the most important part of fire safety is preventing it to start with.

The first stage to Fire Prevention is Fire Risk Assessment. This is a fact-finding exercise that is used to find fire hazards in your Church or Place of Worship. You need to write this down as a permanent record if you employ five or more people.



Start by looking for 'ignition sources' in the building. These are things that could start a fire because they get hot (like a heater), have naked flames (like candles) or could otherwise cause a fire (like a faulty electrical wiring). Arson is also common - many fires in Places of Worship are started on purpose.

Next, look for the things in the building, which could catch fire especially those that are near to an Ignition Source. Items such as books, stored goods, furniture, building materials and rubbish are typical.

After you have done this, list the groups of people who are at risk from this fire hazard. Initially, anyone who is close to the fire would be at risk. As the fire grows, other people in the building would also be at risk from the smoke produced. The fire could affect other people who are passing by and the people gathered at the fire assembly point.



Don't forget if any people with specific needs are at risk, such as disabled people, the elderly or infirm, new or expectant mothers or babies and young children.

Lastly, consider what you already have to reduce the risk. A fire alarm system could detect a fire in a kitchen or fire extinguishers could be used to put out a waste paper basket fire while exits would allow people to evacuate quickly.

Are you doing enough already to reduce the risks?

Simple fire prevention measures

- Don't use the boiler room as a store room.
- Don't store rubbish close to the building.
- Have a No Smoking policy.
- Take care when using candles – use them in flame-proof holders on a stable surface and away from flammable items and take care when children are nearby
- Don't store items anywhere where they could interfere with people evacuating the building.
- Secure the building to prevent arson attacks and limit the number of keys.
- Lock away valuables and items that could be used to start a fire when they are not needed.



Fire Procedure

People must be told what they must do in case of fire. Usually, you would have a 'Fire Action' poster on display near fire alarm call points and fire extinguishers.

It might also be necessary to have special instructions for certain people to follow in case of fire to shut off equipment, to make an announcement over a PA system or to ensure people can evacuate safely and quickly. Some people might need to check that the building has been evacuated or liaise with the Fire Brigade when they arrive.

These details need to be written down in a Fire Procedure if you have five or more employees.

Fire Exits



All buildings need to have enough fire exits to ensure that people can get out of the building if there is a fire. For many Places of Worship, this should not be a problem providing there is more than one exit available (larger Places of Worship will need more exits).

Exits must be readily available throughout the building. You must be able to open them without the use of a key and they must be kept clear at all times. Do not use any additional locks on 'push bar to open' doors.

All emergency exit doors must open in the direction of travel when evacuating, and the outside of the exit must be kept clear so that people can move away from the building to a place of safety easily.

Exits must be marked with signs which must have a suitable graphic symbol like the ones shown in this section. Words are optional and arrows show the direction to travel.



Fire doors are designed to prevent the spread of smoke and fire throughout the building, giving people valuable time to get to a fire exit. Keep these doors closed and do not defeat self-closing mechanisms.

Fire Alarms

In all buildings, there needs to be some way that someone discovering a fire can raise the alarm. In small Places of Worship, the simplest way to alert people would be to shout "FIRE!" or use a whistle, as long it can be heard all around the building.

Larger Places of Worship would need an electrical fire alarm system, and this should include smoke detectors, which would provide an extra level of protection. Heat detectors should be used where a smoke detector would cause a false alarm such as in kitchens.



Battery powered domestic smoke alarms are not suitable. In small Places of Worship, it might be acceptable to use mains powered alarms, providing there is some kind of battery backup.

For some Places of Worship, it would not be desirable to have traditional smoke detectors in the ceiling. Special systems are available that use small tubes to take samples of the air to sense for smoke or shine a light beam from one end of the room to the other.

Systems that use a 'voice alarm' instead of bells or sirens might be desirable. Such systems use a spoken message to tell people that the alarm has been activated and are readily available.

In some Places of Worship, emergency lighting might be required, especially when the building is used at night or in areas where there is no natural lighting. In small buildings torches would be adequate, but self-contained units should be installed in larger buildings.

Fire Extinguishers

All Places of Worship need fire extinguishers so that small fires can be put out before people are put at risk. Extinguishers can also be used to control a fire as people evacuate, possibly allowing people to be rescued.

Water or Foam extinguisher should be available throughout the building. Additional extinguishers such as Carbon Dioxide would be needed near specific hazards such as Organs and Kitchens, where a water or foam extinguisher would not be safe to use.



Domestic extinguishers are not suitable for Places of Worship because they are too small. Usually, water or foam extinguishers are rated at '13A', and this is the minimum rating that is usually recommended for normal use, and this is marked somewhere on the equipment.

Fire extinguishers must be marked with signs like the one shown in this section, showing the extinguisher symbol and the flames.

Routine Maintenance

You need to ensure that you keep your fire precautions in good working order – test your alarms each week, your emergency lights every month and check your fire extinguishers every month. Keep a log or record of what is done.



All extinguishers need to be inspected and serviced every year by an extinguisher service company. Alarms also need to be tested and inspected every year. An electrician should test the electrical wiring regularly and electrical appliances should be inspected and tested frequently.

Housekeeping is essential - regularly look around the building and check that fire extinguishers are in the correct place and that they have not been used. Ensure that fire exits are kept clear, both inside and out, and check that they can be opened without a key. Also check for goods stored in parts of the building where a fire could become unnoticed for a period of time.

Keep a look out for fire hazards and early-warning signs like scorch marks on electrical plugs. Ensure that all candles are extinguished and all electrical equipment is off before closing the building.



Training



People need to know what to do if there is a fire. The simplest way to do this is to have a practice fire drill, so that people know what the alarm sounds like, where their nearest exit is and where to assemble outside.

Some personnel, such as stewards and staff, might need additional training and instruction on what to do if there is a fire. This could include a course about the use of fire extinguishers. Most fire extinguisher service companies run courses in basic fire safety and the use of extinguishers.

Summary

The basic elements of Fire Safety can be split into five key points.

1. Prevent fire. By taking some simple steps, you can limit the likelihood of fire affecting your Place of Worship. Use Risk Assessment to identify those items that need attention.
2. Detect fire. If fire starts, you need to know about it as soon as possible. Fire detectors should be installed (but these might not be necessary in the smallest of Churches or Places of Worship). Someone who discovers a fire must be able to warn others in the building.
3. Control the fire. Extinguishers can be used to extinguish smaller fires or to assist people evacuate the building.
4. Make your escape. Fire exits enable people to evacuate the building quickly, so they are not put at risk from the smoke and heat. Exits must be marked with signs and be readily available.
5. Maintain the equipment. You might never think you will need if, but ensure that fire extinguishers and other equipment is checked regularly and serviced appropriately.

By following the above guidelines, you will not only be on the way to compliance with the new fire regulations, but you will be protecting your congregation and your building from fire.

Produced by ChurchSafety

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

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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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