

# Church SAFETY

## ChurchSafety InfoSheet: Fire Risk Assessment

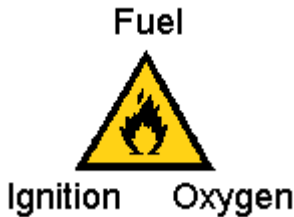
Fire Risk Assessment is an important part of fire safety in any building, and it is similar to other kinds of Risk Assessment. Simply follow the steps outlined below. Please also see the ChurchSafety Website for additional information about fire safety.

Look for the hazards

With Fire Risk Assessment, there are three kinds of fire hazard (which are known as “the fire triangle” as all three are needed for fire):

- Sources of fire, known as Ignition Sources.
- Materials that could catch fire, known as Fuel Sources.
- Sources of oxygen.

The Fire Triangle



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

Look around the building to see what could be a significant hazard. Typically, things like heaters, candles and electrical equipment could be sources of ignition, but Arson is also a possibility. Likely fuel sources come from books and papers, furniture and stored goods. Oxygen is a constituent part of air, but consider how ventilators, air conditioning systems and windows could contribute to the fire.

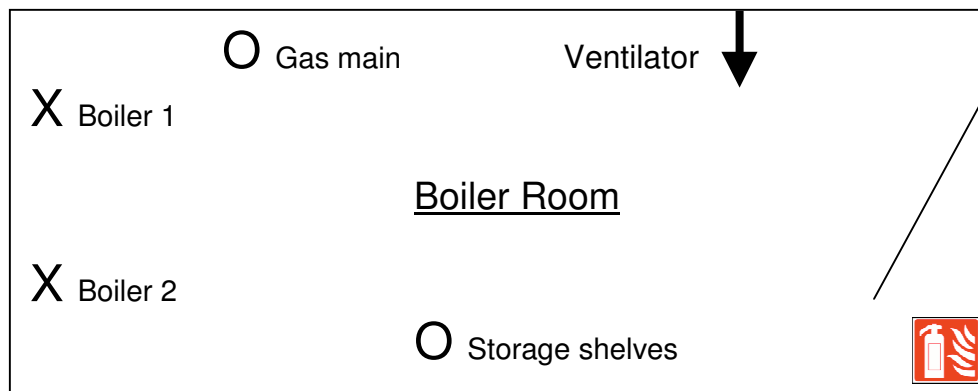
Take the below examples of the three parts of the triangle:

| Ignition sources                                                                                                                                                                   | Fuel Sources                                                                                                                                                                  | Oxygen Sources                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candles</li> <li>• Cooking equipment</li> <li>• Lighting and electrical wiring</li> <li>• Equipment that could develop a fault</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paperwork</li> <li>• Furniture</li> <li>• Curtains</li> <li>• Stored items</li> <li>• Fuel for heaters</li> <li>• Rubbish</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open windows and doors</li> <li>• Ventilators and fans</li> <li>• Air conditioning</li> <li>• 'Oxidising' chemicals</li> </ul> |

Don't forget to include areas of the building that you don't use often, like boiler rooms, basements and attics. It is often in these areas where fire hazards can remain unchecked.

A useful technique is to use a floor plan to mark on the hazards so that you can see exactly where the problems are: Simply mark a cross 'X' where the ignition source is or a 'O' where a fuel source is. An arrow could be used for oxygen sources if needed. Write next to it a brief description of the hazard. This method can be useful to help you see where the hazards are in the building.

The diagram below shows a simple plan for a Fire Risk Assessment. Only the boiler room is shown as an example and a complete assessment would require the whole building (and any outbuildings) to be considered.



Tips:

It is useful to also show the location of fire fighting equipment, fire alarm call points and exits on the plan.

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.

### Decide who might be harmed

A fire in a building can affect many different people in many different ways. The numbers of people that are near the hazard will increase the risks, so will the type of person.

Initially, any person who is immediately next to the fire would be at risk. This might be a person preparing food in a kitchen, someone maintaining the building in a relatively inaccessible place or even the whole congregation.

As a fire increases, so will the number of people who are at risk from the fire. People trying to evacuate the building might be affected by smoke, and this needs to be shown in your Risk Assessment. The effects of smoke spreading within the building might be increased with ventilators, air conditioning systems and open doors.

Many Places of Worship are open to members of the public, so the assessment must also consider these people. It is also wise to consider how a fire might affect passers by and nearby buildings. In your assessment, make a note whether disabled, elderly, young children or babies are also at risk - you might need to refer to this when you plan on how to evacuate the building.

Note too that you must assess for cleaners, contractors and anybody else that come into contact with your building, paying close attention to those who work alone where they might not be made aware of an outbreak of fire.

### Evaluate the risk

Using the information you have gathered about the hazard (like the number of people at risk), work out if the risk is HIGH, MEDIUM or LOW. With this system, careful judgement is needed because it is very easy to underestimate the risk (which is human nature).

|             |                                                                                   |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High risk   | There is a high chance of fire starting and many people are likely to be at risk. |
| Medium risk | There is some chance of fire starting and people could be at risk.                |
| Low risk    | There little chance of fire starting and few people are at risk.                  |

Risks should only be marked as low if you have done all that you can to prevent the risk. Medium risks are typical (showing there is room for improvement), and high risks tend to be for things that are very dangerous.

With fire hazards, the risk depends not only on the possibility of fire starting in the first place but how quickly it could spread. This could be because there are flammable goods near something that could start a fire. Decide if ignition sources are too close to fuel sources – this is the first stage of fire prevention.

You need to find out what you do to limit the risks and think about anything else you can do to reduce or eliminate the risk. These are often called controls and include things like:

- Moving away fuel sources from ignition sources
- Closing vents and windows that don't need to be kept open
- Protecting flames, candles etc...
- Using heaters and candles safely
- Changing one cleaning substance for another
- Maintaining fire exit routes and other means of escape
- Fire alarms, detectors and extinguishers

Many safety precautions such as fire alarms and fire extinguishers need a schedule of maintenance and testing. This might include, for example, testing a fire alarm every week or checking fire extinguishers every month visually for damage or use.

Further details of these are available on the ChurchSafety Website and some of these are mandatory under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

### Record your findings

Where fewer than five people are employed there is no need to write down the assessments, however, a written record is suggested as being useful for future reference. ChurchSafety suggests that all risk assessments should be written down.

You must be able to show on the assessment the following:

- You have done a proper check for hazards in your building and you have asked other people;
- You have taken action against the major hazards to reduce the risks to an acceptable level;
- The things you have done are good enough and reduce the risk as much as possible.

The exact format that your assessment takes is totally up to you. It is strongly recommended that you use a clearly marked ring binder to hold all risk assessments in one place. If you have taken any actions to further reduce the risks, also make a note of this. Finally tell people about the findings of your assessments and a fire safety policy and evacuation plan is a good way to do this.

## 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 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.

## Generic Risk Assessments

On some Websites, it is possible to download completed 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. Every Church or Place of Worship is different – different buildings, different congregations, different safety precautions etc...

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.

## Fire Risk Assessment Example

| 1. List the fire hazards including ignition sources, fuel sources and oxygen sources. Make a note of when these hazards are close together.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 2. List the people who are at risk from fire or smoke. Consider where people would be in case of fire and who is specifically at risk.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 3. Evaluate the risk of fire. Decide what is being done / can be done to reduce or remove the risk.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Boiler room.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note proximity of storage shelves especially to boiler 2</li> <li>- Note gas main location</li> <li>- Room housekeeping poor and dusty</li> <li>- Note vent in boiler room (cannot remove)</li> </ul> <p><i>Heater in vestry - two bar fire</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note location of filing cabinet, books and linens</li> </ul> <p><i>Rubbish and items outside building could be an arson hazard</i></p> | <p><i>People in the boiler room</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maintenance contractors, service personnel (annually)</li> <li>- Caretaker (weekly)</li> </ul> <p><i>Other people using the building</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 50 people in Worship on Sundays</li> <li>- 25 people in weekday service</li> <li>- Visitors throughout the week</li> </ul> <p><i>Personnel in vestry</i></p> <p><i>Other people in building (see above)</i></p> <p><i>People in building (see above) and passers by</i></p> | <p><i>Medium Risk</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boilers serviced annually</li> <li>- Powder extinguisher in place, marked by a sign and serviced/checked</li> <li>- Sort out storage area and remove anything no longer needed.</li> <li>- Clean up dust and dirt, improve housekeeping</li> </ul> <p><i>High Risk</i></p> <p><i>Replace heater for modern radiator (oil filled) or small fan heater.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Heater needs to be PAT tested</li> <li>- Move items away from heater</li> </ul> <p><i>Low Risk</i></p> <p><i>Remove items from building regularly and ensure no build of rubbish up in future.</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.

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