



Keeping People Safe

CHURCH HEALTH & SAFETY TOOLKIT

Self Assessment

 ecclesiastical



How safe are your church and church hall?

Every year, a number of accidents occur in churches, church halls, graveyards and churchyards. Not only does this cause pain and suffering to those who are injured, it can often result in the disruption of the smooth running of the church and its various activities.

For example, if a cleaner, caretaker, organist or other voluntary or paid member of the church staff is injured and unable to carry out their normal duties, it may be extremely difficult to find a replacement at short notice. As well as the possibility that an injured person may look to make a claim against the church for compensation, in some circumstances it may be possible for a criminal prosecution to be brought against the church under health and safety law.

Self Assessment

This self assessment will help you to identify some of the steps you might need to take to manage health and safety properly. It will also pinpoint some of the more common hazards where further action may be necessary. In this context, the following question set is not exhaustive and you might have to consider other aspects to meet some of the legal duties you may have. This will depend on your own particular circumstances and the guidance we have prepared will help determine what is required of you. This is available at www.ecclesiastical.ie/riskmanagement

Take time to work through each of the questions, using the notes provided to help you answer them. When responding, think about your own church and the activities that take place there. If you answer 'No' to any of the questions, the notes will help you decide what further action you might need to take. Using your responses, you can then develop a plan to help you meet any responsibilities you may have.

It is a good idea to review your health and safety arrangements periodically or when circumstances change. It may be useful to revisit your responses to this questionnaire to help you do this.

Managing Health and Safety

Notes

1

Do we need advice on how we manage our health and safety responsibilities?

Yes No N/A

Where your church is an employer, you should appoint someone who is competent to help you comply with any relevant health and safety obligations you may have. A competent person is someone with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to manage health and safety properly.

Where you are not confident about managing health and safety you may need to develop your competency further or bring in external help for support. This may only be the case for larger or very active churches with significant numbers of employees, volunteers and visitors, or where there are many diverse activities

2

Do we need to prepare a written Safety Statement

Yes No N/A

A Safety Statement is a written document that sets out your general approach and commitment, along with the arrangements that you have put in place for managing health and safety in your church.

Where you are an employer and have three or more employees, you will need one and it will need to meet certain requirements. For example, it will need to detail the organisation and arrangements for managing health and safety. Any risk assessments you complete will help inform what needs to be included. The Safety Statement will need to be revised periodically and communicated to all employees and volunteers. If you have fewer than three employees, you do not need to prepare a Safety Statement. However you should still provide basic Health and Safety information to them.

If you prepare a Safety Statement, you should formally minute its adoption. You may also want to consider how health and safety is reviewed over time.

Notes

3

Do we need to complete risk assessments?

Yes No N/A

You need to ensure that reasonable precautions are in place at the church. To do this, you need to think about what might cause harm to people. You will then need to decide if the precautions already in place are adequate. If they are not, you may need to identify further action to prevent any danger. When done formally, this is known as a risk assessment.

Where you are an employer, you must complete these and they will need to meet specific requirements. In particular, they must identify the steps you need to take to comply with relevant health and safety regulations. If you employ three or more employees, they must be recorded detailing any significant findings and those who may be especially at risk.

You should also remember that if you own or control premises, you might still have to complete detailed risk assessments for certain hazards (for example asbestos)

Whatever the case, completing risk assessments is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork. It is about identifying sensible precautions for your church. Completing these on their own won't prevent accidents happening, but it is important that you implement the precautions you have identified as being necessary.

4

Do we provide adequate training and information?

Yes No N/A

Persons working at the church need to know how to work safely and protect others. To help with this, adequate information and training is important and you may need to provide this for them.

Any risk assessments you have completed should help you decide exactly what is required in your particular circumstances. It should be proportionate and delivered in a timely manner.

For many churches, providing simple information or instruction is likely to be sufficient without the need for extensive technical training or the use of external trainers. Don't forget contractors and self-employed people who may complete work for you. They may need certain health and safety information to do this properly (for example, knowing if asbestos is present). It is also important to consider the specific needs of new, inexperienced or younger employees and/or volunteers.

As far as training is concerned, the key thing is to make sure that it is relevant and easily understood. It should ensure that trainees know the hazards they may face, the precautions they need to take and any emergency procedures they need to follow.

As time goes by, the people in the church responsible for certain tasks may change. Keeping records of any information and training provided will help you to identify when refresher or additional training might be needed. They can also assist in the defence of a claim should one arise. The training record should contain detail of what has been provided, when this was done and by whom, along with trainees signing to state that they have received and understood it.

Notes

5

Are our arrangements for first aid and dealing with any accident adequate?

Yes	No	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

It is important that immediate assistance is provided if someone is taken ill or is injured at your church. First aid can save lives and prevent minor injuries from becoming major ones. As such, you should implement suitable arrangements and provide adequate facilities.

If you are an employer, you will have to meet detailed statutory responsibilities when considering this for your employees. While these do not extend to cover members of the public, we would suggest that you make provision for them as well. The extent of the arrangements and facilities required will depend on your particular circumstances and you may have to formally assess what is needed.

As a minimum, we would recommend that you should have a suitably stocked first aid box, a person who will take charge of the first aid arrangements, and provide relevant information for employees. For larger churches or those running certain events, you may need additional arrangements or facilities including a trained first aider.

In the event of an accident, or a dangerous occurrence, you may need to report it to the Enforcing Authority and keep certain records. Further guidance on what you need to do in these circumstances is provided at www.hsa.ie. Keeping records will also help you to identify patterns of accidents and help when reviewing your risk assessments. As insurers, we would want to see these records if a claim is submitted.

6

Do we carry out adequate health and safety check

Yes	No	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

You should make periodic checks to ensure that the precautions you have taken remain effective and adequate. This may include simple inspections to check that the church premises and any lifting (for example, ropes or chains), work (for example, ladders) or electrical equipment (for example, power tools) are safe. Church utilities (for example, fixed wiring or gas boilers) will need to be regularly checked as well. Where asbestos is present, its condition may also need to be checked periodically by a professional contractor where it is left in situ.

Specific legal requirements will apply where you are an employer or are in control of premises. The risk assessments you have completed will identify circumstances where these checks will be necessary. They should also identify what exactly is required, such as, how frequently these need to be completed. An example is the periodic inspection and testing of fixed electrical wiring every five years

Where you have completed risk assessments or drafted a Safety Statement these should also be subject to periodic review. This may be particularly relevant where you think that they are no longer valid or there has been a significant change

Notes

6

For most churches, things may not change that much over time, but if you decide to hold a different event or activity, you should always consider what additional precautions will be necessary.

Keeping records of the checks you make will help demonstrate that you have met any legal duties that might apply to you.

7

Do we keep adequate health and safety records?

Yes	No	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In some circumstances, keeping certain records is required by law (for example, risk assessments). Beyond this, where things do go wrong, being able to show documentary evidence of the arrangements you have in place can help defend against any claim - particularly if these appear to be fraudulent.

The extent of the documentation required will be dependent on your particular circumstances, broadly, this could include:

- Information gathered as a result of an accident, for example, witness statements, accident book entries, first aid reports, etc.
- Documents completed to meet health and safety requirements; for example, Safety Statement Risk assessments, records of maintenance, inspections or other checks, records of information and training provided, etc.

Managing Specific Hazards

8

Are our precautions adequate to prevent slips and trips in and around our church?

Yes	No	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Slips and trips are the most common causes of accidents in churches. Injury can be caused by slipping on the ground outside the church (due to ice, moss, or raised paving slabs, etc.), or tripping over in the building (due to old uneven floors or trailing leads from electrical equipment, etc.). While most injuries are minor, others can be quite severe and, in some cases are disabling.

You should carry out a thorough inspection of your church to identify any slip or trip hazards and any precautions that are necessary. If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should do this for you.

You should remember to include the churchyard, graveyard, church hall and car park in your inspection where you have them

You should also consider the difficulty the frail, elderly and disabled may have in negotiating access to and from your church, as well other visitors who may be unfamiliar with its layout and features.

Notes

9

Are our precautions adequate where there is a risk of falling from height?

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Everyday tasks involving work at height are required in many churches, but they can pose a risk of serious injury from falls to those involved. Typically, accidents involve falling from ladders or stepladders, raised open edges or through rooflights or fragile roofing material.

In many instances, working at height should be left to the professionals, but in some circumstances it is necessary for church employees or volunteers to do this. Where this is the case, you must plan the work, making sure that it is done safely using equipment that is suitable and properly maintained.

You should identify where work or access at height may be required in your church, making sure that the precautions you have in place are adequate. If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should do this for you.

You should pay particular attention to the precautions you have in place for the safe use of ladders or stepladders.

10

Are our precautions adequate where we use hazardous substances?

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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A 'hazardous substance' can take many forms. Typical examples in a church include petrol, pesticides, insecticides, weed killers, fertilisers and liquid petroleum gas. It can also include any substance whose packaging is marked with a hazard symbol (for example, flammable, corrosive, etc.).

If you are an employer, you should identify what hazardous substances are used at your church, making sure that the precautions you have in place are adequate. If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should do this for you.

For many 'household' products (for example, polishes, paints, cleaning products, etc.), simply following the manufacturer's instructions on storage and use will be sufficient.

11

Have we identified if our church buildings contain asbestos and, if they do, are our arrangements adequate for preventing exposure to hazardous fibres?

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Asbestos, if disturbed, damaged or in a poor condition, can be hazardous to health. Some churches may contain asbestos, particularly if they have been refurbished, altered or extended during the 20th century (but prior to the year 2000). It may also be present in heating systems, flooring or ceiling tiles, pipe organs, organ blower boxes, roofing materials, and so on.

Those responsible for the maintenance or repair of premises (including churches) have a statutory duty to manage the risks from any asbestos that might be present. Here, you must

- Find out if asbestos is present and assess the risk of anyone being exposed to fibres, making and keeping suitable records up-to-date.

Notes

11

- Prepare a plan that sets out in detail how the risks from these materials will be managed, including training, taking the necessary steps to put the plan into action and reviewing it periodically
- Provide information on the location and condition of the materials to any one who is liable to work on or disturb them.

12

Are all electrical systems and equipment in good condition and properly maintained?

Yes	No	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Numerous church fires can be attributed to faulty electric wiring or apparatus. This can also cause serious personal injury, such as shocks or burns.

Electrical systems including wiring, switchgear, any fixed machinery, and portable electrical appliances need to be maintained to prevent danger.

Fixed installations should be inspected and tested at five-yearly intervals.

Portable electrical equipment will need user checks, visual inspections and appliance testing depending upon the type of equipment, the risk of it becoming faulty, and how the equipment is constructed.

13

Are regular inspections of lifting equipment completed?

Yes	No	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Many churches have large, heavy ornate font covers that are raised and lowered by a system of pulleys and counterweights. Similar mechanisms are also used to raise and lower candelabra and sanctuary lamps. In much larger churches, other examples of lifting equipment could include passenger lifts and hoists.

In many cases, lifting equipment should be thoroughly examined periodically by a competent person. Usually, this is:

- Every six months for accessories used for lifting and equipment used for lifting people
- Or at least every 12 months in the case of other lifting equipment.

The periods stated are the maximum periods between each examination unless there is an examination scheme produced by a competent person in place, which can specify longer or shorter periods depending on the risk of defects arising.

All examination work should be completed by a competent person (someone with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience).

Notes

14

Have we carried out a fire risk assessment, implementing the precautions identified in it?

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Fires can not only cause significant damage and disruption, but can also put lives at risk.

Employers, owners, landlords, occupiers or those who control premises have a statutory duty to manage the risk from fire.

Here, you must:

- Carry out a fire risk assessment of the premises and review it regularly
- Tell employees and others about the risks you've identified
- Put in place and maintain appropriate fire safety measures
- Plan for an emergency
- Provide employees and others with information, fire safety instruction and training.

15

Are our arrangements adequate where we hold major services, concerts and other fundraising events?

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Many churches host major services (for example, at Christmas or Easter), concerts and public performances, as well as a diverse range of fundraising events (including fêtes, firework displays, charity walks and even abseiling down towers, etc.).

As an event organiser you will need to plan, manage and monitor the event to make sure that your employees, volunteers and the visiting public are not exposed to health and safety risks.

For many events, all that's required is to follow a basic series of tasks. These include focussing on:

- Planning for the event – the level of detail in your planning should be proportionate to the scale of the event and the degree of risk associated with it
- Managing the event so that it runs safely – here you may need to ensure adequate coordination of the activities, provide training for employees and others, monitor the precautions you have put into place, etc.
- Planning for incidents and emergencies – so that you can respond promptly in an appropriate manner. Again, this will be dependent upon the level of risk presented by any event.

16

Are our arrangements adequate where we host public tours of towers or other high levels?

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Notes

Towers by their nature can be hazardous places, so it is important that adequate precautions are taken to guard against accidents occurring

Where tower tours are planned, you should identify specific hazards and check the adequacy of the precautions in place. If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should do this for you.

You will need to consider a number of aspects, including:

- The maximum number of persons permitted on the tour
- Emergency procedures, particularly around evacuation of a person in the event of an accident or medical emergency
- The number of any stewards required and means of communication between them
- The adequacy of access routes
- The adequacy of the protection afforded by parapets and access widths around spires
- Any necessary protection where the tour includes crossings at high level
- The suitability of handrails
- Any precautions where there are height restrictions or other projections
- The adequacy of lighting
- The prevention of unauthorised access
- Safe access to bell ringing chambers
- Suspending tours in the event of inclement weather
- Any storage arrangements required – for pushchairs, large bags, etc. at ground level
- Sequencing tours
- Safety information required for visitors - including notices

Notes

17

Are our precautions adequate to ensure the safety of bell ringers or others entering the ringing room and bell chamber?

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Consideration must be given to a range of precautions, including:

- The means of escape in the event of an emergency
- The evacuation of an injured person
- Providing a safe means of heating
- The provision of fire extinguishers
- The provision of emergency lighting
- Notification of safety procedures to visiting bell ringers.

If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should help you identify if you are doing enough or if additional precautions are required.

18

Are our church buildings, churchyard, graveyard and car park in good order and properly maintained

Yes No N/A

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Accidents can result from the poor maintenance of these and it is sensible to periodically inspect, clean and maintain them, paying particular attention to:

- - Damaged or unsafe glazing
 - Damaged or worn footpaths and stairs, potholes or broken uneven surfaces
 - Damaged lighting
 - Blocked guttering (particularly in autumn and winter)
 - Damaged or unsafe railings
 - Poorly maintained or damaged building fabric (for example, roof parapets, tiles, etc.)
 - Damaged boundary walls and gates

Notes

18

- Diseased or damaged trees
- Unsafe memorials, headstones not property secured

If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should help you identify if you are doing enough or if additional precautions are required.

19

Are tools and equipment used at the church safe and properly maintained?

Yes No N/A

A wide variety of equipment is used in many churches for maintenance, cleaning and repair. This includes ladders, stepladders, lawnmowers, trimmers, strimmers, etc. along with a range of hand tools (for example, hammers, chisels, etc.). These can be a source of injury if they become damaged, are poorly maintained or used incorrectly

Depending on the type of equipment involved you may have to consider a range of precautions, which could include:

- Proper selection (the 'right tool for the job')
- Checking second-hand equipment to ensure that it is safe to use
- Ensuring that any guards or other protective devices are fitted correctly
- Ensuring that there is a proper means of isolating the equipment in the event of an emergency
- Ensuring that operating controls function properly and are labelled if necessary
- Making sure the equipment is used properly (providing adequate training and information where appropriate)
- Adequate maintenance and inspection
- Providing adequate lighting.
- Providing personal protective equipment (for example, gloves, shoes or boots, eye protection, etc.).

If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should help you identify if you are doing enough or if additional precautions are required.

Notes

20

Are our arrangements to protect those who need to work alone adequate?

Yes	No	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Keeping those who work on their own safe is another important consideration for any church. Vulnerable situations can arise frequently, particularly where employees and volunteers are alone in a church (for example, locking up after an event or service).

There may be a greater risk after dark or where they work in the community with people who are emotionally or mentally unstable, under the influence of drink or drugs, or stressed.

Depending on your circumstances, precautions may include:

- Identifying situations where it is unsafe to work alone and ensuring adequate staffing levels
- Installing and maintaining video cameras or alarm systems (including personal attack alarms)
- Implementing arrangements where peripatetic staff report their whereabouts and keep in touch
- Maintaining adequate contact, perhaps by using mobile telephones
- Ensuring that emergency arrangements remain adequate if there is an accident
- Providing training and information, etc.

You may have to consider additional precautions where employees and volunteers are required to work alone while visiting others or at their home office.

If you have to complete formal risk assessments, these should help you identify if you are doing enough or if additional precautions are required.

Want to know more?

We have produced other useful information to help you get started or simply check the adequacy of what you have already done. All are available at:

www.ecclesiastical.ie/riskmanagement

Where you have employees you are required to comply with Health and Safety law. Where this is the case, you will need to understand any specific regulations or guidance that may apply in your particular circumstances. Further information, guidance and other useful resources are available at:

www.hsa.ie

Information in this document

We have prepared this guide in good faith. The information in it is based on our understanding of current law and practice. Neither Ecclesiastical Insurance Office plc nor any of its subsidiaries accept any liability whatsoever for any errors or omissions in this guide that result in injury, loss or damage, including financial loss. It is the responsibility of the Insured or any person to ensure that they comply with their statutory obligations. Any interpretation or implementation of this guide is at the sole discretion of the reader.

Need to contact us?

For further information on health and safety in churches:

Call us on

01 619 0300

(Monday to Friday, 09:00 to 17:00 – excluding Bank Holidays. We may monitor or record calls to improve our service.)

Or visit

www.ecclesiastical.ie/risk/management



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