

CHECKLIST FOR FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS IN CHAPELS

1 FIRE AND ACCIDENT PREVENTION

- 1.1 Are combustible materials, flammable liquids and chemicals stored safely – paint, white spirit, cleaning fluids, paper etc?
Such materials should be stored away from any heat source and from access by children.
- 1.2 Are all heaters fitted with guards and positioned away from combustible materials?
Heater surfaces can cause burns and start fires. Portable heaters are not recommended because they may be placed near to combustible materials.
- 1.3 Is any heating equipment or electrical equipment left on for longer than is needed? Are there reminders in place to turn off all heat producing equipment at the end of the services?
- 1.4 Is the wiring of the electrical installation inspected periodically by a competent person?
Wiring should comply with the requirements of the IEE Wiring Regulations to minimise risk of shock and fire.
- 1.5 Is all portable electrical equipment inspected regularly and fitted with correctly rated fuses?
Regular inspection of such equipment is a requirement of the Electricity at Work Regulations 1990. Check the condition of all the cables and check that the appliances are fitted with correctly rated fuses. A fuse of too high a rating can lead to a fire in the appliance that it is supposed to protect.
- 1.6 Is the use of electrical extension leads and multipoint adaptors kept to a minimum?
Extension leads may constitute a tripping hazard. Extension leads and socket outlets should not be overloaded. Reel-type extension leads should be fully unwound to prevent overheating of the cable.
- 1.7 Are cables run in safe places where they will not be damaged?
Where cables and leads could be a tripping hazard their routes should be indicated with hazard warning tape. Where they may suffer damage by being walked upon they should be run in protective flexible plastic sheathing.
- 1.8 Is any furniture upholstery in good condition?
Old dilapidated upholstery can contribute to the spread of fire. Exposed combustible upholstery filling can be used as kindling material by an arsonist. All new upholstered furniture for non-domestic use should comply with the requirements of British Standards 7176:1995 and BS 7177:1995.
- 1.9 Is stored equipment stable?
Unstable stored equipment can fall, injuring people and obstructing fire escapes.
- 1.10 Is the chapel free of rubbish and combustible waste materials?
Accumulated combustible rubbish increases fire risk in the building and also increases vulnerability to arson. It should be continually cleared from the building and securely stored outside the building, away from fire exits, and not under any overhanging structure.
- 1.11 Have suitable measures been taken to protect against arson?
Doors and windows need to be securely locked when the building is unoccupied. Don't leave ladders about. Consider also:
- Improved perimeter fencing.
 - Perimeter lighting especially at all external doors.
 - CCTV.
 - Intruder alarm system.
 - Fireproof metal boxes on the inside of all letter box flaps.

2 FIRE DETECTION SYSTEMS

These are particularly relevant in larger buildings where several rooms may be occupied concurrently and where some of these rooms may have no direct exit to outside.

- 2.1 Is there an automatic fire detection and alarm system?
A properly installed and maintained automatic fire detection and alarm system does much to reduce the risk to life and property in the event of fire.
- 2.2 Is any fire detection and alarm system in good working order?
Repeated false alarms may encourage the congregation to dismiss a genuine alarm as being "yet another false alarm."
- 2.3 Is any fire detection and alarm system tested weekly?
Systems should be maintained in accordance with BS 5839 Part 1 1988, including weekly testing of the fire alarm.

- 2.4 Are manually activated fire alarm call points clearly visible and unobstructed?
Ideally the alarm should be activated automatically by fire or smoke detector. But manual fire alarm call points should be in conspicuous, safe positions on exit routes and at final exits. Coat racks etc should not obscure or obstruct access to call points.
- 2.5 Does the detection and alarm system provide for disabled persons?
Does the fire alarm system give a visual warning of fire for those who are profoundly deaf?

3 EXTINGUISHING SMALL FIRES

- 3.1 Are sufficient suitable fire extinguishers provided?
A 9 litre water extinguisher, used for paper, wood, cloth, plastics etc, is required for every 200m² of floor area. For fires involving live electrical equipment, carbon dioxide or dry powder extinguishers should be provided near to the risk. Fire blankets should be supplied for cookers.
- 3.2 Are the fire extinguishers and fire blankets located suitably and ready for use?
Generally, extinguishers should be positioned at exits from rooms or storeys, in corridors that form parts of escape routes, and on landings. Extinguishers for special risks such as electrical fires or cookers should be near the risk. All extinguishers, and fire blankets, should be conspicuous, readily accessible and ideally mounted on either wall brackets or floor stands.
- 3.3 Are the fire extinguishers serviced annually by a competent company or person?
Extinguishers should be examined weekly by the 'responsible person' and serviced annually by a "competent person."

4 FIRE ESCAPE ROUTES

- 4.1 In large chapels have measures been taken to ensure that smoke and flames cannot spread from one compartment within the building to another?
The principle structural means for limiting the spread of fire is the dividing of the building into compartments separated from each other by fire resistant walls and doors.
- 4.2 Are there enough fire exits?
The desirable number and width of fire escape doors depend on the size and layout of the building and its occupancy. A single exit is permitted under the Building Regulations for a room with seating in rows where the seating capacity does not exceed 60 persons, the maximum distance that anybody has to traverse to reach a safe exit is not more than 15 metres and the clear door opening is not less than 750mm.
- 4.3 Do the exits lead to a place of safety where persons are no longer in danger of any fire in the building?
This must not be a dead-end situation from which people are unable to move further away from the building.
- 4.4 Are all aisles, corridors and escape routes free from obstructions?
Nothing should reduce the available width of escape routes, and sources of heat or electrical equipment such as portable heaters or photocopiers should not be sited on escape routes.
- 4.5 Are the floors and escape routes free from tripping and slipping hazards?
Changes of level, electrical extension leads, damaged and loose carpets or mats, small items of equipment, wet floors, are all capable of causing people to trip or slip.
Changes of level should be indicated by a colour contrast in the floor finish.
Ramps should be provided for disabled persons at all changes of level on escape routes.
(Use a 'wet floor' sign when cleaning floors.)
- 4.6 Are steps and stairs in a good state of repair?
Loose handrails, raised or loose floor tiles, and damaged step nosings may all cause people to trip whilst escaping from fire.
- 4.7 As an aid to those who are blind, are there tactile thresholds at the top and bottom of each flight of stairs?
- 4.8 Are final exits always unlocked when the premises are in use?
Final exit doors which do not have a panic latch or lock must always remain unlocked when the premises are in use and be secured by means that do not require the use of a key in order to release the door. The ideal fastening for a fire exit door is a panic latch or lock that may be released by pressure upon a bar that runs across the full width of the door.
- 4.9 Are internal fire doors labelled as such and normally kept closed?
All fire doors should have signs on both faces of each leaf, stating "Fire door keep shut." A "Fire door keep locked" sign should be fixed to fire doors on cupboards or store rooms that open onto escape routes. Wedges and doorstops should not be used to hold fire doors open.
- 4.10 Are the self-closers on fire doors operating correctly?
Faulty or incorrectly set self-closing devices will not automatically close fire doors.

- 4.11 **Do the doors on escape routes open outwards towards the escape exit?**
Normally, doors on escape routes should open in the direction of travel. They must do so if they lead from an area from which more than 50 people may be required to escape, or if they lead from an area of high fire risk such as, for example, a kitchen. Where this is not practicable in existing chapels the fire service should be consulted.
- 4.12 **Are escape routes clearly signed?**
Escape routes that do not constitute a normal means of leaving a building should have signs that conform to the requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996. These make use of pictograms employing the running man, an open door, and directional arrows. The older text-only signs are no longer acceptable on their own.
- 4.13 **Are escape routes adequately lit?**
Fire escape routes should be provided with artificial lighting. Because the mains electricity supply may fail in a fire, emergency battery-operated escape lighting is required in high-risk situations i.e. basements, windowless parts of the premises, and in stairways. Emergency escape lighting should conform to the requirements of BS 5266 Part 1:1999 and be regularly maintained.

5 FIRE PROCEDURES

- 5.1 **Has an emergency plan been drawn up to respond to a fire?**
The plan should include the action to be taken by all relevant persons in the event of fire, the evacuation procedure, including arrangements for the evacuation of disabled persons, the location of the assembly points, and the arrangements for calling the fire brigade. The plan should make clear who is to be responsible for the implementation of its various parts. In order to ensure its long term effectiveness, it should be rehearsed regularly, and reviewed and updated in the light of any shortcomings uncovered by the rehearsals.
- 5.2 **Have plans been made and rehearsed for evacuation of disabled persons?**
Disabled persons may need assistance to escape in the event of fire. A plan of how best they may be helped should be drawn up, and tested in the course of the regular fire drills.
- Are lightweight evacuation chairs available?
 - Has each disabled person a personal acquaintance who is assigned to stay with them throughout the evacuation?
- 5.3 **Is the 'responsible person' and any other assisting persons adequately trained?**
They must know:
- how to operate the fire alarm system,
 - how to use the fire fighting equipment provided,
 - how to call the fire brigade,
 - the location and use of the escape routes,
 - the location of the assembly points,
 - how to assist ministers and members of the congregation in evacuating the chapel.
- 5.4 **Have you, the 'responsible person,' recorded the findings of your fire risk assessment?**
This is good practice as proof of the carrying out of your duties and for subsequent checking. It should:
- recommend the actions required to remedy all the faults identified by the assessment.
 - set dates by which such action should be completed.
 - make recommendations as to any new fire protection measures or systems that should be introduced.
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- 5.5 **Have you told the church about your findings?**
The findings of the fire risk assessment and any ensuing recommendations should be brought to the attention of the minister and deacons and to the church and congregation.
- 5.6 **Are fire action notices displayed prominently where they will be seen by the congregation?**
Your local fire service can provide guidance on the contents of fire action notices and on how they should be displayed in each of the areas of risk within your premises.

6 MAINTENANCE OF FIRE MEASURES

- 6.1 **Does the 'responsible person' keep a schedule of maintenance requirements and action for:**
- Electrical equipment?
 - Electrical circuits?
 - Fire detection and alarm systems?
 - Battery-operated emergency lighting?
 - Fire extinguishers?
 - A good quality first aid kit?
- 6.2 **Has a procedure been established to review the fire risk assessment periodically?**
This is necessary because the fabric and usage of the chapel premises may change with time.