

The Gospel Standard Trust

D J Playfoot
(Secretary)

Cavepits · Marle Place Road · Brenchley · TONBRIDGE · Kent TN12 7HS
(Home) Tel/Fax 01892 722184
(Office) Tel 01580 713055 Fax 01580 720656 Email Darrell.Playfoot@playfoot.co.uk

To: The correspondents of Gospel Standard Chapels

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Dear friends

New Fire Regulations affecting chapels

Chapels have been considered workplaces because ministers are paid to preach. They have therefore been subject to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997. Local Authority Environmental Officers and Fire Officers have inspected chapels, given advice and laid down requirements that have had to be implemented.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which comes into force in April 2006 confirms and extends the provisions of the previous fire legislation for most building types including chapels. A 'responsible person' has to be appointed to protect 'relevant persons.' The 'responsible person' is a 'person who has control of the premises' in connection with the purposes for which the chapel is used - a minister, deacon, or some other person with delegated powers. 'Relevant persons' are any persons who are or may be lawfully on the premises, and any person in the immediate vicinity of the premises who is at risk from a fire on the premises.

Measures have to be in place to prevent fires, warn of fires, extinguish small fires, provide fire escapes, establish fire procedures and ensure all these measures are adequately maintained.

The 'responsible person' must carry out a risk assessment. The legislation does not insist that this be recorded in writing for buildings in which less than five are employed. Though written assessments would therefore not be essential for our chapels, they are always beneficial for record and monitoring purposes and for proof that appropriate risk assessments have been carried out.

The attached checklist covers risks and measures relevant to chapels. Their importance will depend on the size and complexity of the premises and the practicability of application within the constraints of existing buildings. Many of our chapels are old, small, simple structures with few persons in the congregation. Fire detection systems, elaborate emergency escape procedures and fire drills would often not be needed. Single exits might be acceptable. Inspectors from the fire services can check buildings at any time, make recommendations, serve enforcement notices to make sure recommendations are implemented and issue prohibition notices stopping use of the building if necessary. But the legislation is not intended to force building owners to carry out expensive unnecessary work. 'Reasonable' measures are to be taken.

Your local fire service can be asked to visit and comment on the building's fire safety and your risk assessments. Such advice could be particularly useful for larger chapels which may be multi-storey including basements and may have many rooms including kitchens. Companies insuring chapel premises are experienced in all aspects of fire prevention and protection and are willing to give advice.

Many of the required measures are commonsense. They come within the general duty of care for our fellow men which those Christians who are responsible for buildings will willingly embrace.

Please note that the Trust does not claim any particular expertise in the area covered by this letter and the enclosure. In bringing the matter before the chapels we are setting out what we believe the position to be and, whilst the papers have been reviewed by a Divisional Fire Service Manager, it is up to those responsible for each chapel to consult their Local Fire Officers, Local Authorities and other professionals as may be applicable.

The Trust would be willing to consider requests for financial assistance from needy churches to assist in meeting the requirements of these new Regulations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D J Playfoot', written in a cursive style.

D J Playfoot