

Kickstart

Gets you started on key issues:

- What are the issues?
- Does it affect us?
- What do we do next?

Health and safety issues in churches are particularly important, with the large number of different members of staff we have through (often unskilled volunteers, unfamiliar with our premises and practices.) Schools need to be even more vigilant in the area of health and safety, not only because of the vulnerability of children.

Health and safety

Why bother?

If someone is employed in the church setting then health and safety law applies. In any case, certain obligations are owed to everyone else! As an organisation churches also have a **duty of care** to those using our facilities. Accidents in church are also particularly bad news for a whole host of reasons.

Schools need to be even more vigilant in the area of health and safety, not only because of the vulnerability of children but also because they tend to be more heavily scrutinised.

What do I need to do ?

If the church as an organisation employs less than 5 people then you simply need to effectively manage the main risks to the staff and those using your facilities. You also need to record and occasionally report more serious accidents to your district council's Environmental Health Department.

Once you employ five or more people you **must by law** have a safety policy. This document says who is responsible, describes the main risks and some of the procedures to stop things going wrong. It should be an active document which is used for training and is regularly reviewed and updated.

You will also need to produce written risk assessments, these are simple documents which record your assessment of the health and safety hazards posed by your operation. The assessments should consider these hazards and address

those with the most serious risk.

One of the risk assessments that you will need to carry out as an employer is a 'fire risk assessment'. Like the other assessments it has to be recorded if there are more than 5 employees. This requirement arises from 'The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations' 1997. You can get help and advice on this risk assessment from your local fire service fire safety officer.

What are the risks and priorities?

- The higher risk groups particularly children and old people, are much more likely to suffer accidents.
- The most common accidents are slips and falls – look at simple things like wet floors, trailing leads, poor lighting, ill fitting carpets.
- The next most common are injuries from lifting, pushing and pulling. Reduce loads as much as possible and use mechanised aids. Be careful how you use those who are unsuitable for this type of work.
- Other problems in churches have related to unsafe electrical equipment, ensure where necessary it is properly earthed is regularly tested (see KickStart on electrical testing) and runs via RCD protection. Hot water, particularly water boilers cause burns and scalds. Be careful where these are positioned and ensure leads are tucked away.
- If you hire a building ensure you know what the fire alarm sounds like

and what to do when it sounds. Are the emergency exits available for use?

- If you own or rent a building in poor condition keep a look out for asbestos. Generally if it is in good condition it can be left alone once it starts to break down and if it cannot be sealed it may need removing. Contact your local environmental health department for advice.

Where can I get more help?

The health and safety in most churches is enforced by your district council's environmental health department. These may be the same people you have contact with for food hygiene issues. They will be willing to help you and have a range of free leaflets and inexpensive one-day training courses to help you get it right.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) enforces health and safety in higher risk sites such as factories, schools and building sites. Despite this they publish a wide range of general literature much of it free. Contact Info line on 0541 545500 or see their web page (www.open.gov.uk/hse/hsehome.htm) Schools guidance in this area is also available from various educational bodies.

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