

Church fire guidance

Church repairs and restoration



There is a serious danger of fire or accident when works of repair or restoration are in progress and Managing Trustees should, in their own interest, exercise close supervision of all such works.

They should also impress upon the building contractors the need for a thorough inspection whenever work ceases for a meal break or at the end of the day to make quite sure that there are no signs of incipient fire caused by blow lamps, surreptitious smoking or temporary unapproved electric circuits.

Basic precautions

All workmen should be shown the location of fire extinguishers and be told where responsible officials or telephones can be found in the event of an emergency. The local Police and Fire and Rescue Service should be advised if major repair works are to be undertaken.

During the contract period, responsible church officials should inspect the church carefully at the end of every working day ensuring that all is in order. Whenever possible, irregular visits should also be made during the day.

Smoking

Smoking should be prohibited throughout the site if possible and must never be permitted in the buildings or where flammable liquids or vapours are present. Where permitted, it should be confined to a designated area with adequate waste disposal arrangements, and the area thoroughly inspected at the end of each working day.

Temporary electric wiring

Any temporary electric wiring should always be installed in accordance with the 'IET Regulations for Electrical Installations' (BS 7671) Current Edition. Circuits should be physically disconnected from the mains supply at the end of the day even where the mains switch is turned off at night. Where there is a risk of mechanical damage to wiring, suitable protection should be provided or the wiring re-routed.

Waste material

Ensure that it is clearly arranged that all fittings are unpacked outside the church. Paper, straw, crates and other waste materials should be removed for disposal and should not be burned. Attention to the removal of trade and other combustible waste on a daily basis is essential.

Asbestos

Before any maintenance or construction work is undertaken, it is essential that you are aware of any asbestos which may be present in the building and that it is either removed or measures are put in place to ensure it is safe.

There are two types of asbestos survey that can be undertaken: a Management survey, or a Refurbishment and Demolition survey. A Management survey may be appropriate where simple and routine maintenance work is being undertaken but otherwise a Refurbishment and Demolition survey should be undertaken. A competent person must be employed to undertake the survey of the premises to identify asbestos containing materials (ACMs). The survey should be carried out in accordance with the HSE Guidance 'Asbestos: The survey guide'.

Further information is available on our [website](#).

Your architect will need to be closely involved with all stages of the survey process, any removal of asbestos and any subsequent plan for managing asbestos. All contractors will also need to be kept informed.

Hot work permit

A 'permit to work' system must be adopted where hot work is being undertaken unless there is no risk of damage to any surrounding property. It is essential that a hot work permit system is in place where roof work is being undertaken.

The person nominated to authorise hot work, normally the fire or safety officer, must have experience or training in the problems associated with hot work and be of suitable status to ensure compliance with the procedures.

Prior to the commencement of work a hot work permit should be obtained from the authorised person. This should be done on every occasion that hot work of any type is undertaken within or upon the fabric of established buildings or any structures or plant in the open. This procedure should also apply to construction sites once fitting out has commenced, and to all buildings which are being refurbished.

A hot work permit should not be issued without considering the significance of any other permits to work in the vicinity, or adjacent processes which may involve the use of flammable liquids or gases.

A hot work permit should also be issued for a specific task that is undertaken in a clearly identified area. Hot work permits should not be issued for protracted periods. Separate hot work permits should be issued for work which extends from morning to afternoon periods. Before completing the first part of the hot work permit, the person responsible for carrying out the work should complete the checklist shown on the hot work permit to indicate that fire protection measures are adequate, suitable precautions have been taken and the equipment to be used is safe.

If the person authorised to issue the hot work permit is not satisfied with the arrangements, further measures may be requested, and any additional conditions should be entered in the space provided. The earliest time at which a final fire-check should be made will also be specified. This will normally be at least one hour after the time of expiry of the hot work permit, when work must be complete. If trained personnel will not be available to make this check (for example, in the case of a permit issued late in the day) work must not be commenced. The hot work permit should be completed in duplicate, with the top copy being handed to the person responsible for carrying out the work. The second copy should be retained by the issuer who may wish to inspect the site of the work or instigate spot checks to ensure that conditions have been met and that work is complete before the hot work permit expires. The completed form should be returned to the issuer and retained for future reference.

Flammable materials

Provisions should be made for gas cylinders, paints, oils and any other flammable liquids or materials to be stored outside, well away from the building in secure, lockable, adequately ventilated compounds. Smoking must be prohibited in storage areas. Building materials are attractive to thieves and precautions should be taken to prevent their unauthorised removal. If spraying of roof timbers is undertaken, this should only be done in a well-ventilated atmosphere and all forms of heating switched off until work is complete. Illumination of the work area should be by means of suitable low-temperature fluorescent lighting. Halogen lights must not be used.

Site huts

Huts provided for workers' breaks or storage should be erected well away from the church and be adequately secured.

The organ

Special precautions may be needed to prevent damage to the organ by water or dust such as covering with polythene sheeting. There is a possibility that the organ blower housing may contain asbestos. Seek specialist advice from the organ builder.

Stained glass

Stained glass windows, particularly those of historic interest, should be suitably protected against accidental damage – either metal mesh or temporary boarding can be considered.

Theft

While work is in progress, altar furnishings and other valuables should be locked away in an office or storeroom or be removed to the home of a responsible official for safekeeping. You should ensure that easy access to roofs is prevented by arranging for ladders to be removed and suitably secured at the end of each working day.

Scaffolding is valuable and attractive to thieves and practical measures should be taken to ensure, as far as possible, that both fixed and unfixed scaffolding is not at risk from unauthorised removal.

Site security

Keep the general public away from the area of the works by erecting suitable barriers and warning notices. Access via scaffolding must be prevented by removal and securing of low-level ladders and it may be necessary to erect perimeter security fencing to keep intruders well away. The base of any scaffolding should be enclosed with either timber or metal hoardings to a minimum height of 3.0 metres. In some instances, alarm protection of the scaffolding may be desirable. Specialist systems exist for this purpose and have proved to be most effective.

Workmen's tools, plant and unfixed building materials should not be left unsecured on the site. Provision should be made for a lockable compound or site hut.

CDM Regulations

The Construction (Design & Management) Regulations apply to all construction work in Great Britain. You should be aware of your responsibilities under these regulations. As a 'client' – an individual or organisation for whom construction work is being carried out, you have a number of specific duties under the CDM Regulations. The guidance to the CDM Regulations summarises the duties of a client as follows:

- Make suitable arrangements for managing a project. This includes making sure:
 - other dutyholders are appointed;
 - sufficient time and resources are allocated.
- Make sure:
 - relevant information is prepared and provided to other dutyholders;
 - the principal designer and principal contractor carry out their duties;
 - welfare facilities are provided.

A project is notifiable to the HSE if the construction phase will be longer than 30 days and have more than 20 workers on site simultaneously at any point in the project or 500 person days of construction work.

Insurance

Methodist Insurance should be advised as soon as building work is contemplated. We will issue a building works questionnaire to be completed by the architect and church who should indicate the insurance obligations of the Church Council under the terms of the contract. In certain circumstances, the employers (i.e. the Church Council) may need to arrange additional insurance cover in respect of:

- (a) the existing structure together with the contents; and
- (b) the works and all unfixed materials and goods other than builders' plant, tools and other equipment.

The Church Council must ascertain that the builders have effected suitable insurances against Public Liability (Third Party) and Employers' Liability risks and that such insurances have been extended by specific reference to protect the interests of the Church Council. A copy of the insurance policy schedule or a letter of confirmation from the builder's insurance brokers must be obtained. For major works (usually where the contract value exceeds £1,000,000), Methodist Insurance will require that the contract is subject to the Joint Code of Practice on Fire Prevention on Construction Sites, jointly published by the Construction Federation and The Fire Protection Association.

Copies are available from:

The Fire Protection Association
London Road,
Moreton in Marsh,
Gloucestershire
GL56 0RH.

or can be downloaded from the Fire Protection Association website:

www.thefpa.co.uk

Information in this document

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Need to contact us?

For further information and advice on fire safety for churches:

Call our Risk Management Advice Line on

0345 600 7531

Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm (excluding Bank Holidays).

We may monitor or record calls to improve our service.

Email us at: riskadvice@micmail.co.uk



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