

# Keeping people safe

## Health and safety toolkit

### Volunteers



Volunteering is at the heart of any church and its mission. Supporting others for no financial gain can bring many positive benefits not just to the community served, but also to the volunteers themselves.

Many churches rely on the support of volunteers to function properly. They make an invaluable contribution, completing a wide range of tasks. You should consider the precautions needed to protect those who volunteer at your church, but health and safety requirements shouldn't be a barrier to volunteering.

Under common (or civil) law, voluntary organisations and individual volunteers themselves have a duty of care to each other and others who may be affected by their activities. Where something goes wrong, individuals may, in some cases, sue for damages as a result of another person's negligence.

To be successful, the injured person must show that the defendant had a duty to take reasonable care towards them, and they have suffered the injury through a breach of that duty. They must also show that the type of loss or injury for which damages are being claimed was a foreseeable result of the breach of the duty.

In addition to common law, there is also criminal (or statute) law. This is the written law of the land, consisting of Acts of Parliament or Rules, Regulations or Orders made under them. Criminal liability can arise for failing to comply with the requirements of these, leading to prosecution, fines and – in extreme circumstances – custodial sentences.

The main statutory legislation is the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, supplemented by more specific regulations made under it. The Act applies to any organisation (including a church) which has at least one employee. It sets out a number of duties on employers, intended to protect their employees and volunteers if they have them.

You should generally afford the same level of protection to volunteers as you do to any employees. For example, this may mean that you have to provide them with relevant information, training or personal protective equipment. However, where volunteers have significant knowledge about how to work safely already (say as a result of their normal occupation), the extent of training or information needed may be less. For example, where a painter or decorator volunteers to carry out such an activity they may well be expected to know how to use a ladder safely.

It is also important to note that certain aspects of the Act may still apply to you even if you do not have any employees. In particular, this would be where you control non-domestic premises used as a place of work, or where machinery, equipment, appliances or substances are provided for use by others (e.g. volunteers, members of the public). Here, you must take reasonable steps to make sure that these are safe.



## Want to know more?

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

[www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/healthandsafety](http://www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/healthandsafety)

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the enforcing authority for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

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## Need to contact us?

For further information on health and safety in 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](mailto:riskadvice@micmail.co.uk)



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