



Fire Prevention

Fire loves the unprepared

A well-prepared fire plan will protect your Church and your congregation. The suggestions in this paper have been designed to help you ensure your Church is as well protected as possible.

THERE ARE 5 MAJOR CAUSES OF FIRE:

1. Arson
2. Faulty electrics
3. Poor heating
4. "Hot work" – including welding and angle grinding
5. Cooking

Arson

Places that are easily accessed, frequently unoccupied and set away from other buildings – places like Churches – are easy targets for arsonists. Arson damage is often catastrophic as the fire is deliberately caused to maximise damage.

But there are some simple things that can reduce the risk.

Checklist – minimising the risk of arson

Install security lighting inside the building.

Install security lighting outside the building.

Keep flammable liquids in locked metal cabinets.

Install a monitored security and fire detection system.

Keep the site tidy, remove combustible rubbish such as timber, dry leaves and cardboard boxes from in, under and around the buildings.

Limit access and ensure you know exactly who has keys to the property using a key register.

Prevent access to the roof area – except by authorised people.

Install perimeter fencing and locked gates to limit access.

Seek advice from your local Fire Service.

Secure wheelie bins by chain / padlock to a post away from the building.

Faulty electrics

One spark is all it takes.

Exposed wires and electrical shorts can produce sparks. While most of these will simply cause an inconvenience, in the wrong conditions can start a blaze.

Your best defense is to keep all appliances regularly maintained and ensure you have a properly installed safety board. Ensure switchboards are serviced and maintained.

Consider Thermal Imaging – refer to Concordia's Electrical Safety paper for further risk protection information.

Heating

Churches need heating.

Most Churches have large halls, many with high ceilings and steeping roofs. To warm these spaces takes a lot of heat.

TIPS TO HELP YOU ENSURE THE SAFE USE OF HEATERS:

- avoid portable heaters; from small bar radiators to large gas heaters
- heaters are more of a hazard without thermostats
- ensure all heating is a permanent fixture, well installed by professionals
- keep your heaters serviced regularly
- keep flammable items at least one metre away from any heater

Hot work

Hot work is any work process that creates a fire source such as sparks or flame. For trades-people, this includes grinding, welding or cutting metal.

Many fires that result from building or maintenance work and start with stray sparks. Often, an enthusiastic workman is more interested in getting the job done than ensuring the working area is fire safe. Embers also can stay hot long after the work has been completed.

Experience has shown that an acceptable standard of care and supervision is far more likely to be achieved where a documented **“hot work permit system”** is enforced. Therefore, a precaution checklist should be established to highlight the important steps to take during hot work operations.

Kitchens

More property fires start in kitchens than anywhere else. Gas flames, hot oil, electrical outlets, gas appliances and electrical appliances are all potential fire hazards.

The best prepared kitchens have more than one type of protection.

Install a smoke detector.

You must have a smoke detector in or very close to your kitchen. Check with your local fire brigade about where is the best place for it.



Have an extinguisher on hand.

It must be the right type of fire extinguisher. Dry powder is often the most favored – as this works best for electrical, fat and oil fires, however it can create a mess. Check with your fire extinguisher equipment supplier: they can advise you on the most appropriate for your specific needs.

Get a fire blanket.

They're cheap and effective. They're ideal for putting out small fires that start in pans or trays. They can also be used to smother fires in a deep fryer. In the event of a person's clothing catching fire, a fire blanket can smother the fire, while protecting the rescuer.

Train your people.

Anyone working regularly in your kitchen, must be given fire protection training. Ensure, at the very least, they know where the equipment is located, how it is used and the limitations of each device.

You could also...

Install a sprinkler system.

This is extremely effective, but it can be expensive. However, it will go some way to reducing your insurance premium.

Install a monitored alarm.

This is a less expensive alternative to the sprinkler system. Having your heat or smoke detectors linked to a monitored alarm station means a faster response from the fire brigade in case of an emergency.

Monitored smoke detectors

Churches are often unoccupied and unless someone is there, fires can spread quickly. Battery powered smoke detectors only work when someone is there to hear them. By using detectors that are wired into the main power source and have good coverage of the Church – and linking them to a monitoring service – means the fastest possible response in case of fire.

Compliance with legislation

Check with your local fire authority or a professional fire protection company to ensure you comply with legislation.

We recommend you use a company that provides a fire equipment maintenance service. They provide invaluable advice.

They should provide an inspection every six months. This would include recharging out-of-date or used extinguishers and they provide evidence of compliance with legislation. These companies can provide valuable training in the use of extinguishers.

Specialist advice on fire prevention

The best advice comes from a professional.

The best place to start is by contacting your local fire authority. In most cases the information and guidance offered is free of charge. For smaller facilities, that information may be enough for your needs. For larger facilities or those in higher fire danger areas, paid professional advice is usually money well spent.

It all adds up

The better prepared your property is against fire, the better off you'll be.