

EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE IRELAND

GUIDELINE No. 06: Health and Safety Management in Churches

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1.0 Introduction to Health & Safety in a Church Environment

Just as businesses, entertainment centres and schools must comply with Irish laws in managing health and safety, there is an obligation on churches to do likewise.

The main governing body for workplace health and safety in Ireland is the Health and Safety Authority (the HSA). They state that charities (the sector that churches fit into) apply the same principles of hazard identification and risk assessment that relate to businesses.

2.0 Laws that apply to Churches in relation to Health and Safety

Although many churches depend entirely upon unpaid volunteers, we believe that our best advice to all churches is to build a good health and safety system using the principles of Irish laws that apply to employers.



All churches have what is known as a duty of care - a moral and legal obligation to ensure the safety or well-being of others. Therefore, there is a legal obligation upon all to avoid carelessly causing injury to persons. If your church asks a volunteer to do a task, which results in them injuring themselves or anyone else, the Leaders of the church may be liable.

Duty of care needs to be considered in all churches activities. Some examples are:

- Slips, trips and falls anywhere within the church building or the grounds of the church.
- The need for emergency escape from the building in the event of a fire, especially for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and the deaf community (See Guideline 07).
- Organising special events during the summer and providing a bouncy castle for children.
- Pressure of work on church staff that can lead to ill health from real or perceived problems. This can result in severe stress, with a negative impact upon a person's well being.
- Sending volunteer on challenging missionary trips without adequate assessment of the culture they are stepping into, the provisions made for their care while overseas and whether their emotional well being could cope with such changes / challenges.
- An employee or volunteer working alone in the church building with no person to contact if they become ill.

The main legal requirement for churches in the area of Health and Safety can be summarised as:

- Identify potential hazards
- Do a risk assessment of each hazard
- Prepare a written Safety Statement based on the risk assessments.

3.0 Definition of Terms

Hazard

A potential source of harm or adverse health effect on a person or persons. For example: fire, trips and falls, back injuries from moving furniture, stress upon church administrators with too many duties and weak oversight by the leaders, etc.

Risk

The likelihood that a person may be harmed or suffer adverse health effects if exposed to a hazard.



<i>Risk Assessment</i>	A careful examination of what could cause harm to people. Following this assessment, the church can put in place controls to reduce the risk to what is known as a 'reasonably practicable' level. By doing this, the church can weigh up whether it has taken enough precautions or whether more work is required (refer to the example in Appendix A).
<i>Controls</i>	Measures that are used to modify or reduce a risk. A simple control measure would be to ensure a gas or oil fired boiler is inspected by a competent person.
<i>Reasonably Practicable</i>	Doing what is reasonably practicable to ensure the health and safety of employees and others. In a past Irish legal case, this was summarised by a judge that <i>"a slight risk is allowable, if the cost of remedying it is unreasonably high."</i>
<i>Competency</i>	Defined in the 2005 Act as a person who possesses <i>"sufficient training, experience and knowledge appropriate to the nature of the work to be undertaken."</i>

4.0 How do we do a Risk Assessment?

The Health and Safety Authority considers risk assessments the cornerstone of the safety statement. Therefore, developing a method of risk assessment that is appropriate to your church is critical to drafting a good safety statement. Safety statements that do not have good risk assessments are meaningless.

At this stage, let's summarise the steps to take:

1. Identify all hazards and do a risk assessment on each.
2. Evaluate and prioritise the risks (high, medium, low).
3. Decide on preventative action and what controls need to be in place.
4. Take the necessary action and if needed, improve your levels of control.
5. Monitor and review.

The most simple measurement, or assessment, of risk involves a basic mathematical formula such as:

Risk = likelihood (probability) multiplied by severity (consequences or impact).

You can use a colour coding to quantify the risk as per the following 'four by four' method. Note that to avoid the temptation of just going for the middle ground, we always suggest this over the more simplistic 'three by three' method.



Likelihood is how often that event is likely to occur.

Red	4	Very Likely
Amber	3	Likely
Yellow	2	Possible
Green	1	Unlikely

Severity is the potential impact in terms of severity of the consequences should an event occur.

Red	4	Significant or Major
Amber	3	Serious
Yellow	2	Moderate
Green	1	Minor

Final Risk Score Table: (Likelihood x Severity)

Red	12-16	High
Amber	6-9	Medium
Green	1-4	Low

As you can see, this formula allows you to develop a method of risk assessment based around a traffic light (“RAG” red, amber and green). This is where high-level risks are rated ‘red’, medium level risks are rated ‘amber’, and low level risks are rated ‘green’. This kind of risk assessment may be helpful to indicate general levels of risk within your church.

As part of the risk assessment you must identify what is needed to reduce or eradicate the risk. Churches are then required to implement any improvements considered necessary by the risk assessment. As always, your objective should be to make sure that no-one gets hurt or becomes ill.

A special note on Psychosocial Risks



Over recent years, there is a growing focus within charity circles on risks such as stress, bullying and harassment. Experts state that the risk to employees or volunteers can have a higher frequency in what is known as unregulated organisations (such as churches). Therefore, it is important for a church to put in place systems to protect employees and volunteers from such risks and these must be included in the risk assessments.

Risk assessments must be in writing. We recommend that all safety statements include a detailed section on risk assessments that prove the church clearly understands and has taken the time to ensure that a system is in place to look after employees, volunteers and all users of the services provided by the church.

5.0 What is a Safety Statement?

Section 20 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 requires the trustees or directors of the church to produce a written programme to safeguard:

- The health and safety of all employees.
- The health and safety of other people who might be at the church, including service users, volunteers, members of the public and contractors.

The areas that should be covered by the safety statement are specific and are set out in Section 20 of the 2005 Act. The statement should:

- Specify how the safety and health of all employees will be secured and managed.
- Specify the hazards identified and risks assessed.
- Give details of how the employer is going to manage safety and health responsibilities, including:
 - a. a commitment to comply with legal obligations.
 - b. the protective and preventive measures taken.
 - c. the resources provided for safety and health at the workplace.
 - d. the arrangements used to fulfil these responsibilities.
- Include the plans and procedures to be used in the event of an emergency.
- Specify the duties of employees including the co-operation required on safety and health matters.
- Include the names and job titles of people being appointed to be responsible for safety and health or for performing the tasks set out in the statement.
- Contain the arrangements made for appointing safety representatives, and for consulting with and the participation by employees on safety and health matters, including the names of the safety representatives and the members of the safety committee, if appointed.



- Be written in a form, manner and language that will be understood by all.
- Have regard to the relevant safety and health legislation.

6.0 Who should prepare the Safety Statement and Risk Assessment?

As a first step, the church leaders should appoint a responsible person (see definition above) as Health and Safety Manager, tasked with coordinating the Risk Assessment and preparing the Safety Statement. The Health and Safety Manager may be competent to do the work in-house or may need the advice of external resources.

0.7 Action points following completion of the Risk Assessment and Safety Statement

Once these resources are complete, church leaders / trustees must ensure that:

- The document is brought to the attention of employees, volunteers and regular users of the churches services.
- All leaders are familiar with implementing the procedures that are identified. (What is written must be backed up by what actually happens in practice.)
- Any remedial work identified during the risk assessment should be carried out.
- Any resources identified within the document should be put in place e.g. policies to ensure children are safe, resources for the elderly, fire extinguishers serviced and wall mounted, areas designated as fire points, ladders in use are on a preventative maintenance programme, etc.
- The document should be reviewed and updated at least once a year or when risks are altered or new risks added.

0.8 Our responsibilities to international people in our church

The church should be committed to giving information and training in a manner likely to be understood by all users of the church services.

The church should recognise the language needs of those for whom English is not their mother tongue. This must be taken into consideration in relation to training instruction and the signage used throughout the building for exits and areas where access is restricted.

0.9 Additional Resources

Information and resources on Health and Safety can be found on the following websites and reference books.

Websites:

Health and Safety Authority, www.hsa.ie



IOSH, www.iosh.co.uk/irelandbranch

Health and Safety Executive (UK), www.hse.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive (Northern Ireland) www.hseni.gov.uk

Ecclesiastical Insurance Company: www.ecclesiastical.ie

Allianz Insurance Company: www.allianz.ie

Health and Safety Review Magazine: www.healthandsafetyreview.ie

The International SOS Foundation: www.internationalososfoundation.org (for missions work abroad)

Publications

Bullying and Harassment (HSENI)

Electrical Safety (HSE)

Fragile Roofs (HSE)

GA3 – Report of Results of Inspections of Work Equipment for Work at Height (HSA)

Getting to Grips with Manual Handling (HSE)

Get a Grip – Stop slips and trips (HSA)

Guidelines on Risk Assessments & Safety Statements (HSA)

Safety Toolkit and Short Guide to General Application Regulations 2007 (HSA)

Stress Policy (HSENI)

Using Contractors (HSE)

Using Ladders Safely (HSA)

Workplace Safety and Health Management (HSA)

Byrne, R., 2008. Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Law in Ireland 2nd ed. Dublin:Nifast



Appendix A Example of a Risk Assessment of Work at a Height

Let us take working at heights as our example for a risk assessment. This can be a fairly common need within church buildings for maintenance, changing light bulbs etc. Falls from ladders account annually for at least two fatalities and 220 injuries. In some cases, ladders are not suitable and it is necessary to install scaffolding.

Steps to Take	Action Required
1. Describe the activity that the church is involved in	The church has decided to install additional speakers in the main auditorium to improve the quality of the sound. It will be necessary to employ a contractor who is competent in such work and who uses suitable scaffolding.
2. Nominate a person to take responsibility	The worship leader takes responsibility for this and begins to cost the job. He is not familiar with working at heights and asks the Church H&S Manager for help.
3. Identify the hazards of this activity	Working at heights represents a number of hazards such as the need to erect suitable equipment to gain access to the roof fittings. If this equipment is poorly erected, it could collapse causing serious injury to those involved in the project.
4. Assess the risk	Using our risk assessment principle above, the likelihood of something happening could be a 3. The severity or consequence of a fall from a height is definitely a 4. This gives us a final risk score of 12, which tells us that the risk of working at a height is high (even with careful controls in place). If you choose to use a colour coding, this would give us a RED risk for work at a height.
5. Itemise the various control measures to be put in place	<p>Even if a contractor is carrying out the work, the church is still responsible for ensuring that it is carried out safely. For this reason you must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the contractor is suitably qualified to carry out the necessary electrical work. • Ensure insurance is up-to-date and sufficiently comprehensive. • Ensure that they will use a mobile tower to access the installation points (ladders are not suitable where anyone is in one position for 30 minutes or more). They



Steps to Take	Action Required
	<p>must have appropriate certification and be qualified to operate such equipment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the contractor has a written method statement of exactly how the work is going to be carried out in a safe manner. This should include the use of signing and guarding of a safety exclusion zone, which is needed in case an object falls and injures someone below the work area. This would then need to be reviewed by the Church H&S Manager before work commences. <p>The contractor must complete Form GA3 as required by the HSA for working at heights with clear sign off from the person who made the inspection of the equipment before work commences. There must be a first aider available for the duration of the work.</p>

The above can be summarised by again referring to our steps above:

- Identify the hazards and do a risk assessment.
- Evaluate and prioritise the risks (high, medium, low).
- Decide on preventative action and what controls need to be in place.
- Take the necessary action and if needed, improve your levels of control.
- Monitor and review.

