



 THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  

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ARCHBISHOPS'  
COUNCIL

To Diocesan Secretaries, Chancellors  
Archdeacons, Secretaries of DACs

Church Buildings Council  
*Anne Sloman*  
Chair

11 August 2010

Dear Colleague

### **Safety in Churches**

In late 2008 a tragic accident occurred in a church that resulted in the death of a churchwarden. The fall took place from a vertical tower ladder. I am therefore writing to remind you of the guidance available, and how the Church's procedures can be used to take action in response to hazards identified. We should be grateful if you could circulate this note through your diocesan networks.

In general, church buildings are considered to be low risk health and safety environments. However, it is important that all hazards major and minor are identified and dealt with quickly.

Responsibility for the safety of persons in a church or churchyard lies with the incumbent and Parochial Church Council. Where a PCC has employees, duties are likely to arise under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. (There are circumstances in which the Act also applies in the case of volunteers.) Regulations made under the Act prescribe certain duties, such as the production of a health and safety policy and a risk assessment.

If there is any doubt as to the applicability of health and safety law in relation to a particular church, we suggest that advice is taken from the Diocesan Registrar.

It is important in all cases that risks are properly managed for the care of all those who use a church including visitors. The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group publishes a valuable set of guidance notes enabling churches to make an assessment of risks in areas such as:

- Floor surfaces
- Churchyard safety
- Stairways and tower access
- Falls from height
- Bell ringing
- Hazardous substances
- Asbestos
- Electrical gear
- Fire safety for major services
- Lifting equipment
- Safety glazing
- Machinery, ladders etc.
- Manual Handling
- Food safety
- Reporting of accidents
- Child protection
- Procedures for outside activities
- Disability issues
- Fire risk

The EIG also recommends that the PCC appoints an individual member with specific responsibility for health and safety. Even if such an appointment is not made, it is important that risks are identified by the PCC and appropriate action taken. A record should be made in the PCC minutes and church log book of the assessment and work carried out.

Apart from the guidance available from the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group, [www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk) has a section on health and safety which includes additional guidance on fire safety, asbestos and other areas.

Although responsibility for the care of churches lies with the PCC, the legislation covering the care of churches gives the opportunity for wider input into fabric matters including health and safety, which are summarised below.

**The Quinquennial Inspection Report.** Inspections are mainly aimed at the repair needs of the church, but will also cover issues such as electrical safety, asbestos, lightning conductors and high level access, as described in our guidance booklet *A Guide to Church Inspection and Repair*. It is important that recommendations of the report that touch on safety issues are followed up as priority items.

**Canon F18.** We hope that the opportunity is taken during the triennial survey of churches by the Archdeacon (or a deputy) to ensure that the recommendations of the quinquennial report have been followed through, and that other hazards have been identified.

**Articles of enquiry.** The annual articles give the opportunity to focus on issues such as the implementation of the recommendations of the quinquennial report, the management of unsafe gravestones, and the identification of asbestos.

**Inspection by churchwardens.** The annual fabric inspection prior to delivery of

the fabric report to the annual parochial church meeting gives an opportunity to identify hazards, and review the risk assessment. Although this is an annual exercise, it is of course helpful for churchwardens to keep a watchful eye out for possible hazards.

If you have any questions arising out of this letter, please contact [jonathan.goodchild@c-of-e.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.goodchild@c-of-e.org.uk), telephone number 0207 898 1883.

Yours sincerely

**Anne Sloman**  
**Chair, Church Buildings Council**