

# CHURCH SAFETY & SELF INSPECTION GUIDE





## Introduction

Welcome to the *Church Safety and Self-Inspection Guide*. No matter what your position in the church, this document, along with the *Church Self-Inspection Form* ([www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org)), will help you identify potential exposures and take steps to prevent losses at your church. With any good safety program, a number of the key safety features are administrative elements. We will look at some of those before beginning our walk through of the church facility. When we do begin our survey, we will begin outdoors where it all starts, as church members and visitors alike step from their cars in the parking lot and begin walking toward the sanctuary or Sabbath School classrooms. Additional information can also be found in the booklet, *Protecting the Church and It's People*, on Adventist Risk Management's website at [www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org).

Church administrators need to recognize the importance of making safety a top priority in all aspects, from services, to Sabbath School classes, to activities, like potlucks, Pathfinders, and various outreach programs, including mission projects. Church employees, volunteers, visitors and children all require safe facilities and safety and health programs that help protect them from harm

## Administrative

- The church administration has appointed a Church Safety Officer
- A child-abuse prevention program is in place
- A six-month rule is utilized for volunteers seeking to work with children
- Criminal background checks are performed for all employees and volunteers
- There is a Church Safety Committee. *(In a small church, one option is to have safety addressed as a permanent part of staff/board meetings, at least monthly.)*
- The Church has written safety rules
- Church employee and volunteer health and safety programs are in place *(training, personal protective equipment 'PPE' provided, etc.)*
- Accident investigation and reporting procedures are in place
- Facility self-inspections are conducted
- Preventive maintenance programs are in place
- Prompt repairs of leaks and other conditions to prevent further deterioration
- The church has a written emergency plan
- All staff, Sabbath School teachers, elders, deacons and volunteers know their roles in an emergency

## Church Protection

Early detection of fire or break-in, and monitoring by a central station allows for quick response and less damage or loss. It requires systems that detect smoke or break-in, alarm notification to a company that monitors those systems and prompt notification to fire or police by that company. While total security is preferred, churches might consider putting alarms in areas where the greatest losses might occur (video and sound rooms, computer equipment rooms, accounting areas, music equipment storage, etc.).



- Sprinkler systems where installed receive annual professional maintenance
- Multi-purpose fire extinguishers are within 75 feet of any location (150 feet apart)
- Fire extinguishers are checked monthly for tampering or pressure loss
- Smoke/heat detectors (hardwired with battery backup)
- Fire alarm system
- Fire alarm systems are tested annually and are functioning properly
- Hard-wired carbon monoxide detectors in buildings with fossil-fuel heating and hot water heaters
- Lightning protection is installed
- The church has a security system
- Fire and security alarm systems are monitored by a central station
- Dusk to dawn perimeter lighting is used
- Trees and shrubs are trimmed to reduce the potential for crime and/or assaults
- Lawnmowers, fuel for lawnmowers and other flammables are stored in a separate storage building
- Key/access card inventories are maintained
- Keys are marked "Do Not Copy"
- The church maintains a written list and photographic inventory of building contents and valuables

## The Church Grounds

Many accidents on church property are a result of trip and fall accidents, which are caused by defective parking lots and sidewalks, slippery surfaces, debris from trees and loose gravel, and unmarked changes in walking surface heights, among others. Transitions in levels, which can include steps, can also be a challenge for some church members, and handrails help provide stability for them on stairs, ramps and other changes in elevation. Look for these and other issues that can cause people to slip, trip or fall.

- The parking lot is free of potholes, cracks, twigs and tree limbs, loose gravel and other debris
- Sidewalks do not have cracks, lifting from tree roots, deterioration from weather, and other defects that cause tripping
- Snow and ice is removed immediately, icy areas appropriately treated
- Water from downspouts does not cross walks where it can freeze and cause slip and fall accidents
- All steps have handrails
- Spaces in railings/balusters are less than 4 inches
- Step railings are firmly secured
- Wheelchair accessible ramps are available
- Open sides of steps or platforms have upper and mid-rails (and toeboards for balconies and overhead storage areas)
- Ramps have guide and upper rails to keep wheel chairs from dropping off
- The parking lot and sidewalks are well lit
- Trees are properly maintained and dead limbs removed
- Fences and gates are in good condition
- Driveway chain barriers, if used, have reflectors



## Enter Without Risk

We would like to hope that once we enter a church we would safely make it to the sanctuary or a Sabbath school class without injury. But that is not always the case. Water is sometimes tracked into the facility creating slippery areas, and defective floors also increase the risk of an accident. Activities increase the risk of falls, as well, as power cords and speaker wires are run across floors and aisles, which can also affect emergency egress and violate life-safety codes.

- Non-slip rugs/mats with tapered edges are used inside entranceways (not towels) to collect water, ice, snow and mud
- No torn or wrinkled carpeting or loose tiles and flooring
- No cords or speaker wires on floors across aisles and doorways
- Wet floor signs are used and wet conditions are mopped immediately when wet areas and spills are observed
- Aisles, steps and exit passageways are free of boxes, chairs, musical instruments and other hazards that can cause trip and fall accidents or hinder emergency egress
- Interior steps and changes in elevation have handrails
- Handrails have at least 1 ½ inch clearance between rails and walls they are mounted to
- Handrails are not loose

## Safe in the Sanctuary

On many Sabbaths and during special events, the Sanctuary can be full to overflowing. Safety is a concern at any time, but when facilities are bursting at the seams, it is harder to maintain safe conditions and tempting to violate life-safety codes. Keeping designated aisles clear of chairs, pianos, and other objects is more challenging.

- Aisles are clear of cords, podiums, chairs, pianos, candles and other objects.
- Exit route maps are displayed throughout the facility
- All exit doors are unlocked during occupancy
- Exit doors have panic hardware. (Deadbolts, chains with locks, and other devices prohibited.)
- Exit doors are in good condition and function properly
- Exit doors swing out in the direction of exit travel
- Rooms with more than 50 occupants or that are greater than 1000 ft<sup>2</sup> have two exit doors
- Exit doors serving 100 or more occupants have “panic” hardware (**Note:** In some jurisdictions, this requirement is for 50 or more.)
- The maximum occupancy for all assembly areas is posted
- All exits are adequately marked with lighted exit signs
- Emergency lighting is in place and operates properly
- Pews and other seating are properly secured and in good condition
- Doors, passages and stairways that might be mistaken for an exit have “approved” signage stating “NO EXIT.” (“NO” in 2-inch high letters with 3/8<sup>th</sup> inch stroke width and “EXIT” in 1-inch high letters below the word “NO.”)
- Dead-end corridors do not exceed 20 feet



- Lighting is adequate throughout
- Paper and combustible decorations mounted on walls do not exceed 20% of the wall surface area
- All classrooms, youth rooms, offices and other similar areas have vision panels installed to reduce the potential for misconduct or accusations of misconduct (all areas within the room are visible from the outside)
- Glass doors or mirrors have designs applied or etched into them to alert occupants of their presence

## Mother's Room and Rest Rooms

The presence of toddlers and small children in mother's rooms increases potential loss exposures in that area. Children can be pinched by defective equipment, shocked if they push something into an electrical outlet and can fall from infant change tables.

- Electrical outlets within 6-feet of sinks have ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protection
- Electrical outlets in mother's rooms have safety caps installed
- The pads for infant change tables in restrooms and mother's rooms have safety lips and are secured to the change table or wall unit
- Change table safety straps are available and used
- Signage is in place instructing parents to use safety straps and not to leave the child unattended
- Cribs are in good condition and meet Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) guidelines
- Spills are wiped up immediately
- No hazardous chemicals under sinks or accessible in closets

## Baptismal Tanks

Baptismal tanks come with a number of potential inherent hazards. Unless they have overflow drains, water can flow over the top and cause property damage. There is also the potential for slips and falls and even electrocution, all of which have occurred.

- Microphones and other electrical equipment are not within reach of anyone in the baptistery
- Steps into the tank and the tank bottom have non-slip treads or slip resistant surfaces
- Handrails are provided along the steps into the tank
- Baptismal tank has an overflow drain
- The filling process is monitored to prevent overfilling
- Tanks are drained immediately after use
- The heater is checked after the baptism to ensure it has been turned off

## Mechanical Rooms/Janitor Closet

Mechanical and utility rooms can be some of the most hazardous areas in the church. In mechanical rooms you will find power mains, circuit breaker panels and other electrical equipment, as well as furnaces, boilers, water heaters and/or other equipment. Janitor closets generally have shelves of cleaning materials that might be hazardous if not used properly or if children enter an unlocked closet and come into contact with dangerous chemicals. These rooms



are generally built in a manner that provides fire separation from halls, attics and common areas. That fire separation is lost when doors are left open and holes are poked through ceilings and walls and not refilled with a fire-retardant sealer. These rooms need to be kept locked and free of incidental storage, like Christmas decorations and other items. Equipment can be damaged and unauthorized individuals injured if they accidentally strike the equipment while moving storage around.

- Mechanical rooms and janitor closets have self-closing fire-rated doors
- Doors are locked
- Mechanical rooms are free of combustibles, flammables and general church storage
- Good housekeeping is observed throughout the facility
- Main switches, shut-off valves and plumbing are properly labeled
- Mechanical rooms and janitor closets are free of poke-throughs and other openings that negate fire separation
- A multi-purpose type ABC fire extinguisher is mounted inside the door of the mechanical room
- Mechanical rooms have smoke/heat detectors tied to the fire alarm system
- Ground fault circuit interrupter protection is provided for electrical outlets within six-feet of sinks in janitor closets
- Three feet of clear space is maintained in front of electrical panels
- All electrical and equipment panels and junction boxes have covers
- Pinch and nip points on all machinery and equipment are properly guarded
- All chemicals are properly labeled
- Material safety data sheets (MSDS) are available for all chemicals in the church office
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) is available as required by maintenance or janitorial tasks and specific chemicals (masks, gloves, etc.)

## Kitchens and Fellowship Halls

Facilities vary from church to church. Some have small residential type stoves, while others have commercial cooking units. Operations can be the typical potluck or a major food service operation, like a soup kitchen. Potential losses can be property losses from fire, burns from hot items, cuts from knives and slips and falls on wet floors, to name a few. Injuries have also occurred when tables stacked against walls fell over on children. Ensure that egress aisles are available when setting up tables in fellowship halls.

- All exits are clear and adequately marked
- The occupancy for the fellowship hall is posted
- Kitchen exhaust filters, ducts and hoods are clean
- Stoves with fire suppression systems are serviced semi-annually and current
- Heat detection is provided
- A multi-purpose or type “K” fire extinguisher is in the kitchen
- A hood and duct fire suppression system is installed where usage dictates the need
- Refrigeration coils, motors and compressors are free of lint and combustible buildup
- Kitchens are free of grease accumulations
- Foods in refrigerators and freezers are covered
- Walk in freezers or coolers have safety latches



- Floors are clean and free of spills
- Mops and “caution” signage is available for immediate use if spills occur
- Tables and chairs are in good condition
- Tables and chairs are in racks and not stacked against walls
- Adequate aisles are maintained between tables and chairs to allow safe egress from the fellowship hall in an emergency

## Other Activities

Some churches have additional facilities, like playgrounds and childcare and community centers, which will be addressed in separate self-inspection forms. Pathfinder Clubs will also be addressed separately, in an effort to place the responsibility for those inspections on the staff responsible and to keep the Church Self-Inspection as basic as possible and still address a large number of common exposures.

### NOTICE

Materials found in this document are provided as general basic risk control and safety background information for a typical church. This information is not intended to cover all safety aspects of any of the topics discussed. Nor does it address all local and governmental regulations that may apply, which is not possible. The maintenance of safe premises, operations, and equipment, and the training of employees are the legal responsibility of the insured. Administrators and supervisors are encouraged to expand their safety programs and ensure that such programs comply with standards and regulations promulgated by their respective cities, counties, state and provincial or federal jurisdictions. Local regulations and standards may also differ from some of the recommendations found in these materials. For the protection of visitors, volunteers, employees, children and church resources, it is always best to comply with the most stringent requirements. Adventist Risk Management, Inc. assumes no responsibility for the management or control of the insured's safety activities. Liability on the part of Adventist Risk Management Inc. for loss is hereby disclaimed.