

## RISK INFORMATION – CHURCHES

### CHURCHES EMERGENCY PLANNING

Work Health & Safety (WHS) legislation requires employers to create and maintain safe workplaces which includes churches. Your church should plan for emergency situations that might occur which could impact workers, the congregation and others at the church.

This information release sets out topics for consideration in developing your church's emergency management plan.

#### Introduction

An Emergency Plan is a written document setting out how a church will respond to a range of different emergency situations, such as fire, explosion, incidents involving hazardous chemicals, medical emergencies, bomb threats, intruders or natural disasters.

A risk management approach should be adopted to identify likely emergency scenarios and consider the possible consequences of those emergencies including impacts on staff, volunteers, congregations and others.

Plans do not need to be complex but should consider:

- The nature of activities being undertaken at the church (which will vary depending on the day of the week, e.g. Sunday worship services)
- Nature of hazards in the workplace
- Size and location of the church (e.g. proximity to health and emergency services)
- The number and composition of people attending the church (which will vary depending on the day of the week, e.g. Sunday worship services)

Plans should include consideration of the needs of staff who work remotely or from home.

WHS Regulations requires emergency plans to include:

- Effective responses to emergencies
- Evacuation Procedures
- Emergency Services notification
- Medical treatment and assistance
- Communication between officials and others onsite in an emergency
- Testing of emergency procedures
- Information, training and instruction given to workers

Emergency Plans (or a summary of key components) should be easily available to all workers. Normally this would include details being displayed in the workplace, e.g. on noticeboards.

The remainder of this information release considers emergency plan components in more detail.

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#### **Contact Details for Key Personnel**

Are emergency contact details for all key personnel maintained and readily available?

#### **Roles and Responsibilities**

Do instructions identify different emergency scenarios and the relevant actions and responsibilities (e.g. fire response may be very different to a bomb threat response or responding to intruders)?

Is it clear what action is required of the person who first discovers an emergency?

Who can declare an emergency? Who can order an evacuation?

Are roles for managing an evacuation clearly defined, e.g. wardens?

Who can declare an emergency to be over?

Who maintains the currency of the plan? Who approves the plan? Do plans include tenants?

Has a first aid assessment been conducted for the church? Are trained first aid responders available with suitable first aid supplies?

Are there procedures for securing critical functions and utilities such turning off air-conditioning and ventilation systems and turning off gas and electricity?

#### **Emergency Services Contact Details**

Does the plan contain emergency contact details relevant to each type of threat, e.g. fire brigade, police, poisons information?

Are emergency contact details prominently displayed?

Are contact details regularly updated?

#### **Mechanisms for Alerting People to an Emergency**

Is there a method for advising people of an emergency, e.g. siren, bell or public address system?

Is this system regularly tested?

Are workers and others attending church premises made aware of the emergency alerts and how they should respond?

Do plans provide for contacting adjoining residents and businesses in the event of an emergency?

Does the church have alarm systems linked to the fire brigade? Are the connections regularly tested?

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### Evacuation Procedures

Not all emergencies may require an evacuation. For emergencies requiring an evacuation, have evacuation procedures been prepared for each different type of emergency?

Do the procedures:

- include actions for all people who might be present during an emergency
- facilitate safe and speedy evacuation when activated
- cater for people with disabilities
- ensure that tenants and other outside users are included
- account for people evacuated
- clearly identify the assembly point for people evacuated
- ensure that the building has been evacuated, e.g. checking toilets, meeting rooms etc.?

### Map of the Church

The plan should include a map of the church and other structures showing emergency exits, assembly points and location of extinguishers and other fire protection equipment. The plan should be prominently displayed throughout the church and other buildings.

### Training and Communication

All persons with emergency plan roles should be trained in how to carry out their roles. This may extend to the effective use of fire protection equipment. Have first aid practitioners been trained and is training current?

Workers and others (congregation members) should receive instruction on emergency warnings and appropriate responses.

### Testing the Plan

The plan should be rehearsed.

The best test involves rehearsing an actual emergency scenario including people present at the time, for example, a morning worship service. Some imagination will be required where the test involves large numbers e.g. share a meal together after participating in the test.

As a minimum, testing should involve everyone with a responsible role in an emergency. This will include all wardens or similar.

After a test of emergency plans, an evaluation should be undertaken to gauge effectiveness of the exercise. Where appropriate, modify plans.

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#### After An Emergency

Has appropriate medical treatment been obtained for injured persons?

Has trauma counselling been organised?

Are regulatory authorities required to be notified, e.g. Safe Work authorities?

At the conclusion of the evacuation, the effectiveness of the emergency plans should be evaluated and modified where appropriate.

#### The Workplace

Are all entrances and exits clear of obstructions?

Does the workplace have illuminated exit signs? Are these checked on a regular basis?

Is fire protection equipment suitable for the sorts of fire risks likely to be encountered? Are the locations of fire protection equipment clearly identified? Is this equipment regularly maintained?

Are workers trained in the use of the equipment?

#### Chemical Storage

Are safety data sheets available for all hazardous chemicals on site?

Are all chemicals safely stored and labelled?

Is appropriate equipment available to deal with a chemical spill, including personal protective equipment?

Are staff trained in how to deal with a chemical spill?

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#### References:

NSW Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 – Chapter 3 > Part 3.2 > Division 4 > Clause 43

WorkSafe Victoria – Guidance Note: *“Emergency Management: Developing a plan for a small organisation”*

Safe Work Australia – *“Fact Sheet - Emergency Plans”*

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