

# UNION OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

## HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR MEMBER CHURCHES

*Issued by the Administrative Office  
of the Union of Evangelical Churches  
on the authority of the Finance & General Purposes Committee  
Version 02 dated 15 October 2020*

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Churches are governed by health & safety legislation and civil liability in parallel with other organisations. The duty of each Church is to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees and the health and safety of all others who come into contact with our activities, whether on or off our premises. This second group includes members, visitors, workers, children, etc.

1.2 In short we have a duty to protect these people from harm as far as is 'reasonably practicable.'

1.3 The Union of Evangelical Churches (UEC) has provided this guidance to help individual Churches meet their responsibility.

1.4 The aim has been to keep these guidelines as simple as possible while providing sufficient detail to enable you to meet your obligations without undue difficulty.

1.5 They have been sponsored by the Finance & General Purposes Committee of the UEC and are based upon information published by the Health & Safety Executive and in particular their booklets entitled *Health and Safety made Simple* (first published 03/2011), *Five Steps to Risk Assessment* (INDG163 [Rev2] revised 06/2006 and *Health and Safety Checklist for Village and Community Halls*. Additionally we have had some help and advice from a Health & Safety professional.

1.6 This guidance only applies to Churches with four or less paid employees. If you have five or more paid employees please contact the UEC office for further advice.

## 2. Who is responsible?

2.1 **One person** in each Church should be appointed to be responsible for ensuring that appropriate Health & Safety controls are in place, and they should also hold an appointment within the Church governance structure that gives them sufficient authority.

2.2 When making their annual membership returns, all Churches will be required to name their 'responsible person' and to confirm that they have appropriate Health & Safety arrangements in place. Also, that the relevant Audit Forms (H&S & Fire Risk) are completed with any action points clearly recorded and acted upon.

## 3. Managing the risks

3.1 The most effective way of avoiding failings, and to avoid injuries, etc., is to be properly prepared and the best way to do this is through risk assessment and management.

3.2 Risk Assessments need to take account of everyone who comes on to church premises for whatever reason whether they are regular attendees, casual users or trades people, and whether they are young or old, physically fit or incapacitated in one way or another.

3.3 One copy of UEC Health & Safety Checklist follows - further copies can be obtained from the UEC Office.

3.4 There are five recognised steps in the Risk Assessment process.

### 3.4.1. Identify each hazard.

This requires a walk around the church premises both inside and out identifying anything that could reasonably be expected to cause harm. It is important to take account of any previous accidents and where appliances and equipment are concerned the manufacturers' instructions and warnings.

### 3.4.2 Decide who might be harmed and how.

To help you manage risks next identify the groups of people who might be harmed and what type of accident or health risk could arise. For example, children taking part in play activities, or older people with mobility problems negotiating steps.

### 3.4.2. Evaluate the risk and decide upon the precautions.

Having identified the risks and those affected decide what to do about them. The law requires you to do everything 'reasonably practical.' Where possible the hazard should be removed altogether, but restricting access, erecting guards and warning signs offer possible alternatives. When in doubt look for examples of best practice elsewhere. The UEC office is there to help.

### 3.4.3. Record your findings and implement them.

The UEC provides a Health & Safety Checklist for member Churches and you are **required** to use it and to confirm annually with your Annual Return that you are doing so. The aim is for your arrangements to be suitable and sufficient taking into account the use made of the premises and the people who do so. Keeping everything as simple as possible encourages everyone to play their part in promoting safety. It is important to prioritise the changes needed distinguishing between those requiring early, perhaps even temporary, solutions and others that are of necessity longer term.

### 3.4.4. Regularly review your assessment and update where necessary.

At the time of the Annual Return you will be asked to confirm that you have conducted a full formal annual review (H&S Audit & Fire Risk). In-between times you will need to perform partial reviews when activities change or new equipment is installed or comes into use for the first time.

## 4. Consultation

4.1 Church business meetings should be used to raise awareness of Health & Safety matters and written and oral announcements should be made at other times as appropriate.

## 5. Enforcing Authority

5.1 In the UK, for most activities, the responsible regulator for health and safety is either the local authority (usually the Environmental Health Service) or the Health & Safety Executive. In most cases the local authority will be the regulator but the final decision depends on the dominant activity. Churches are responsible to local authority regulators where the main activity is all forms of religious worship, evangelical and church social events and accommodation, e.g. hostels. If the main activity is education or training (both vocational and non-vocational) or medical (hospitals run by a religious order) then the HSE is the regulator.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Additional help

6.1 Requests for advice or help should in the first instance be made to the UEC office.

6.2 The UEC will assist in an initial Health & Safety review for any Church that is not confident about undertaking the Risk Assessment themselves. Please contact the office as soon as possible if you anticipate needing such help.

<sup>1</sup> Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1998 (supplemented by HSE Operational Circular OC 124/11 Rev 1)

