



Keeping People Safe

CHURCH HEALTH & SAFETY TOOLKIT

LIFTING EQUIPMENT



In an industrial setting, lifting equipment such as cranes, forklifts, lifts and hoists are easy to identify. Spotting similar equipment in a church may not be so immediately obvious.

However, many churches do have large, heavy, ornate font covers which are raised and lowered by a system of pulleys with counterweights. Similar mechanisms are also used to raise and lower other fixtures such as large candelabras. Larger churches may have other lifting equipment including chair and passenger lifts, dumbwaiters, hoists, cherry pickers and other equipment associated with construction work.

Legal requirements

Generally, if someone is injured you may need to show that you have met your duty of care. You may also have to comply with more specific health and safety law including the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations. If you are an employer, or have control of lifting equipment, you must comply with these.

Under these regulations, you will need to make sure that lifting equipment is:

- Sufficiently strong, stable and suitable for its intended use
- Positioned or installed to prevent people being injured – for example, from being struck by a load
- Clearly marked with appropriate safety information – for example, safe working load limits etc.

Some lifting equipment and accessories may need to be thoroughly examined before they are used for the first time. Thereafter, all lifting equipment may need to be thoroughly examined at specified periods. These examinations must be completed by someone who is competent, having the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to complete the work. Where those completing the examination advise that there is a defect in the equipment which could cause danger, the equipment must not be used until it is put right.

Hazards to look out for

Some of the typical hazards include:

- People or their clothing coming into contact with pulleys and chains
- Sharp edges or points and rough surfaces
- Damaged parts (e.g. badly worn chains; kinked, twisted or frayed ropes)
- Overloading with loads that are too heavy or exceed safe working limits
- Slip and trip hazards, or other obstructions in the vicinity of lifting equipment
- Poor or no maintenance.*

*Note: this list is not exhaustive

Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- Checking all equipment is complete, with all necessary safeguards fitted, and free from obvious defects
- Checking that surrounding areas are kept clean and tidy, free from obstructions or slips and trips hazards, and are well lit
- Maintaining the equipment properly
- Arranging for the required examinations to be completed
- Ensuring that anyone who uses the equipment is provided with any necessary information and training where this is needed to ensure their safety.*

*Note: this list is not exhaustive

Making a start

Action

1. Identify all the lifting equipment that is used in your church.
2. Check the precautions you have taken are adequate. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed and who will be responsible for implementing them.

Guidance

Broadly, lifting equipment includes any powered or non-powered equipment for lifting or lowering loads. It would include any attachments used for anchoring, fixing or supporting loads (such as chains, eyebolts etc.).

Remember, some items may not be immediately obvious, particularly if they are no longer used or if their use is infrequent.

Any redundant equipment should be decommissioned and made safe so that it cannot be used until it has been removed. A warning sign or label should be displayed advising that it should not be used and locked to prevent use. Where appropriate, the key should be kept in a safe place where others cannot access it.

If you are an employer, you will need to complete formal risk assessments. These should help plan for any lifting work and decide if the precautions you have in place are adequate or if others are needed.

The precautions necessary will depend on the types of lifting equipment you have at your church and your own particular circumstances. These could include those necessary to stop people from being injured by:

- Moving parts of machinery
- Trapping in chains and pulleys
- Sharp edges or points
- Defective or poorly maintained equipment or attachments
- Equipment failure causing loads to drop.

In many cases, proper inspection, maintenance and use of the equipment will prevent injuries from occurring.

Making a start

Action

3. Ensure that the precautions you have identified are taken and remain effective, including any maintenance and servicing that may be required.

Make sure any pre-use checks, inspections and thorough examinations are carried out where necessary.

Make a note of any checks or inspections you make.

Guidance

Preventing danger from the use of lifting equipment relies heavily on the integrity of the equipment and accessories used.

As such, all equipment should be appropriately checked and maintained to make sure it remains safe for use. Some equipment may require simple pre-use and daily checks or periodic inspection. Most equipment will need to be thoroughly examined.

A thorough examination is a systematic and detailed inspection of the equipment, including any safety-critical parts. These need to be carried out at specified times depending on the type of equipment. For example, some equipment might need this before they are used for the first time; after assembly and before use at a particular location; or in other circumstances (e.g. if it has been damaged; failed; been out of service for a long time; or where it has been altered).

Most equipment will need to be thoroughly examined regularly while it is in service. These should be conducted:

- Every 6 months – for lifting equipment and accessories used to lift people
- Every 6 months – for all other lifting accessories
- Every 12 months – for all other lifting equipment.

However, this can be varied to reflect the level of risk associated with simple lifting equipment. Usually, this would be in accordance with a written examination scheme drawn up by a competent person. This could be quite a straightforward document, identifying (amongst other things) the parts of the equipment to be examined and the frequency at which they should be examined. Where such a 'scheme' is prepared, you may need to ensure that it is reviewed by a competent person periodically; during any thorough examination itself; or where the risk associated with the equipment changes (e.g. following an incident).

A thorough examination must be carried out by someone who is competent. They must have appropriate practical/theoretical knowledge and experience of the lifting equipment being examined. However, this should not be the same person that carries out routine maintenance of the equipment as they would be responsible for assessing their own maintenance work.

Continued overleaf

Making a start

Action

4. Make sure people using your lifting equipment are provided with any necessary information and training.

Make a note of any information or training that is provided to individuals.

5. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for the safe use of lifting equipment at your church.

Keep the notes you have made in the steps above.

Guidance

They must also provide you with a written report (containing specified information) once they have completed an examination.

Where they report a serious defect to you, that equipment must not be used until this has been corrected. You may need to take additional precautions to ensure that the equipment is not used in these circumstances (e.g. locking equipment off and displaying adequate warning signs etc.).

The level of information and training required will vary depending on the type of equipment used and your particular circumstances. If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you decide what is necessary.

Generally, for many small churches where straightforward lifting equipment is used, simple instruction on how to use the equipment safely and report defects promptly would be sufficient

However, where more sophisticated equipment is used, more specialist training may be required.

If you have prepared a health and safety policy, record these as part of it. You can use our Church Health and Safety Policy template if you haven't done this and need one to comply with health and safety law.

You should keep the reports of any thorough examinations and other documents (such as the current record of inspection) either in hard copy form or electronically at your church.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at www.ecclesiastical.com/healthandsafety

Further guidance and resources are also available at: www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/loler.htm

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to contact us?

If you would like to speak to someone about health and safety in churches you can either:

Call our Risk Management Advice Line on 0345 600 7531
(Monday to Friday, 09.00 to 17.00 - excluding Bank Holidays)

Or email us at risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com

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