


9.0 Hot works in heritage buildings

This guidance highlights actions that can be taken to limit the risk of fire from hot works.

RISK ADVICE LINE

Having read this guidance should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact us through our 'Risk Advice Line' on 0345 600 7531 (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, excluding bank holidays) and one of our in-house risk professionals will be able to assist. Alternatively you can email us at risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

For queries about your policy cover or claims please contact your insurance broker.



Careless application of heat can be a major cause of fires in the heritage sector.

Common causes include contractors undertaking lead repairs on roofs plumbing or paint stripping tasks.

As well as the potential to cause significant damage to the building from a fire it may impact your business activities and income. It may also have an impact on your reputation. A small amount of planned routine maintenance works has the potential to cause major damage to buildings.

Our experience is that any hot work activity carries an increased risk of fire inception which is increased by poor contractor behaviour and practices. You should consider the following:

- Selection of the right contractor is critical. It is important that the contractor has experience of working in the heritage sector.
- The contractor needs to fully appreciate the nature of the works being undertaken and the risks arising.
- Appropriate procedures should be developed to manage the risk including an emergency situation.
- Only allow the minimum materials necessary for the work in the area affected.
- Combustible materials in proximity to the works should be kept to a minimum.

Adequate supervision and control of contractors undertaking hot works can significantly reduce the risk of fire at your premises.

First steps

In terms of hierarchy of controls. Firstly consider if there are safer alternatives to hot works. For example, can some cutting procedures be done using hand or mechanical methods.

When selecting a contractor the following factors should be considered:

- Ask the contractor to provide evidence of working on heritage buildings and obtain references.
- Is the contractor a member of a professional trade organisation?
- Does the contractor intend to use sub-contractors to assist with this work? Are they also experienced in work on heritage buildings?
- Request details of the contractors method statements and risk assessments.
- Ensure the selected contractor undertakes a site induction to make them aware of the site layout and any emergency arrangements.
- Ensure the contractor has an appropriate level of public liability insurance cover in place. You should request documentation to validate this and seek advice from your insurance advisors.

The Hot Works Permit system

Fires involving hot works often have no Hot Works Permit system in place or there is a failure of appointed contractors to appropriately supervise the hot works being undertaken.

A Hot Works Permit system will usually be required under your insurance policy when hot works are being undertaken at your premises.

It is good practice to develop a Hot Works Permit system to ensure both the contractor and your staff undertaking hot works adhere to it.

The system ensures contractors and staff understand what the work will involve. Also, when and where hot works are permitted. It ensures key safety procedures are undertaken e.g. fire extinguishers are in close proximity to enable a quick response should a fire occur

As a minimum any Hot Works Permit should include the following details:

- The identity of the contractor or staff member who will be carrying out the work.
- What work is actually being undertaken.
- Any hazards identified and mitigation actions to manage these hazards.
- Designated area for hot works.
- Security arrangements.
- Emergency arrangements.
- Fire watch arrangements. These include the following:
 - Equipment including gas cylinders need to be removed.
 - A continuous fire watch should be maintained after completion of hot works as identified by your fire risk assessment.
 - An intermittent fire watch should be maintained for up to 180 minutes with checks between 15 and 30 minutes. The fire watch periods should be determined from your fire risk assessment.
 - Photographs should be taken of hot works undertaken to confirm the watch has been completed. Thermographic cameras are recommended.

- Other site inspection arrangements. The permit should be signed off at the end of the work.

A template Hot Works Permit can be found at www.ecclesiastical.com.documents/Hot-Work-Permit.pdf

Insurance protection

The Joint Code of Practice on the protection from fire on construction sites and buildings undergoing renovation includes a specific section on hot works. An insurer may expect the hot works 'permit to work' procedure to be adhered to for all cases where hot works are involved. This should be discussed with your insurer.

Key messages

- Ensure you take appropriate steps to select a suitable contractor with experience of undertaking work in the heritage sector, particularly when it comes to hot works.
- Ensure all hot works are undertaken using a Hot Works Permit system.
- Fire watch procedures must be observed with firefighting equipment available whilst hot works are being carried out.

Further information

- RC 7 – Recommendations for Hot Work, a useful interactive pdf which includes a Hot Work Permit template can be downloaded free from RISCAuthority – www.riscauthority.co.uk/free-document-library/RISCAuthority-Library_detail.rc7-recommendations-for-hot-work-interactive-pdf.html
- Fire Protection Association – **Fire Prevention on Construction Sites – 9th Edition**

Important Note – For any interventions to your building you will require Listed Building Consent (if a listed building). Also, you should consider any advice given by Historic England, the Amenity Societies and other conservation bodies.

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