

Tower tours



Tower tours are a great way to allow parishioners and other members of the public to enjoy the splendour of your church, while raising funds for a good cause.

However, they can potentially be dangerous as people are being admitted to an area they would not normally visit and with which they are unfamiliar. Church workers or volunteers (for example, bell ringers, vergers, etc.) who regularly enter the tower will be aware of the hazards and will know what to expect; however, members of the public entering for the first time will not.

While accidents are uncommon, we have seen a few causing serious injury. On this basis, it is important that tours are planned so that you have adequate precautions in place to prevent them and effective emergency arrangements in place should the unthinkable happen.

Legal requirements

If you are an employer hosting a tower tour, you must comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the relevant regulations made under it.

Generally, you will need to ensure that any tower tour is properly managed so that people remain safe. You may also need to:

- Complete risk assessments to identify the precautions you need to take
- Implement those precautions, providing information and training for any employees and volunteers on what they need to do
- Document your arrangements and responsibilities for hosting events, perhaps as part of your health and safety policy
- Keep records of what you have done.

Risk Advice Line

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.

More specifically, if you are an employer or have control of premises used as workplace, you will have to comply with the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations. The term 'workplace' is very broad and could include a church.

In relation to tower tours, you may also need to ensure that:

- Staircases and other areas are kept clean, properly maintained and are well lit
- Safe access is permitted
- Floors, steps, etc. are free from obstructions and substances liable to cause someone to slip or trip, have no holes or adverse slopes, are even and are not slippery, and have adequate drainage where necessary
- Suitable precautions are in place to prevent falls from height or the risk of being struck by falling objects.

Even if you are not an employer, you may still have to comply with certain aspects of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and other related law. Here, you may need to make sure any tower tour is hosted in a safe manner.

Beyond this, you also need to meet your common law duty of care, ensuring that any tour does not cause injury to another because you have acted negligently.

Hazards to look out for*

					
Inadequate edge protection at roof level (for example, low parapets or castellations)	Drainage channels presenting trip hazards at roof level	Overcrowding making access difficult or generally unsafe	Confined or restricted access	Inadequate number of stewards	Inadequate arrangements in the event of an emergency, including poor means of communication between stewards
					
Poor access routes with ladders, hatches or sloping roofs	Worn steps or access obstructed with debris	Unrestricted access to dangerous areas (for example, doors onto roof or other high levels)	Restricted or damaged staircases with unsuitable handrails	Low beams, openings and other projections	Poor or inadequate lighting along the access route

Precautions you can take*

					
Repairing damaged steps and maintaining them in good condition	Keeping staircases and other walkways clean and free from obstruction	Providing and maintaining adequate lighting along the access route	Providing handrails to all staircases	Locking all doors leading onto the roof or other high levels that are not part of the tour	Restricting the number of persons allowed on each tour
					
Providing an adequate number of stewards	Providing an adequate means of communication	Suspending tours in the event of inclement weather (for example, high winds, ice, snow, heavy rain, etc.)	Highlighting projections with warning signs and tape		

*This list is not exhaustive.

Action

1. Where tower tours are planned, identify specific hazards and check the precautions you have taken are adequate. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed.

Make a note of these and/or any additional precautions that might be required, noting who will be responsible for taking any action.

In doing this, consider the difficulty the elderly and disabled may have in negotiating access.

Guidance

If you have completed formal risk assessments, these should do this for you. The purpose of these risk assessments is to check that you have complied with your responsibilities under health and safety law. As such, they should identify when and how this applies to you, including any precautions you will need to take.

In many circumstances, your assessments should be recorded, reviewed and updated where you suspect that they are no longer valid.

Key things to consider include:

- The adequacy of edge protection at high levels – particularly that afforded by parapets and castellations
- The suitability of the access route – ensuring that it is suitably wide (including any doorways and at high level around spires), avoiding any ladders, hatches or sloping roofs
- The condition of staircases and steps – ensuring that they are free from defects, excessive wear and waste or other obstructions, and being properly maintained
- The provision of suitable handrails – on all staircases (for example for spiral staircases, ideally a fixed metal handrail on the outer curve). Although not as effective, a simple way to install a handrail is to run a length of rope down the central column fixed at the top and bottom, ideally with intermediate fixings to stop hands becoming trapped
- The adequacy of lighting – along the route, ensuring that it is free from any defect and properly maintained
- Any crossings at high level (for example, clerestories, triforia, roof spaces, etc.) – where additional edge protection and other precautions may be required
- Precautions where there are height restrictions or other projections (for example, low beams, openings or other projections) – including redirecting the route, reducing the number of persons on the tour, restricting or phasing access, providing warning tape, signs or other markings, etc.
- The maximum number of persons permitted on the tour - this should take into account of the size of the tower, the control of movement within the tower, the number of stewards available, and the ease in which persons can safely evacuate the tower in case of an emergency.

As a general guide, the maximum number on a tower tour at any one time should not exceed 15 persons, including the stewards. For smaller towers with more confined, difficult access, a lower number may be more appropriate.

Continued...

Action

Guidance

Where the tower is larger with good access, a larger number may be permitted. However, we recommend that the maximum number of persons in the tower at any one time should not exceed 25 persons. We also recommend that no children under the age of eight years should be allowed on a tour and an adult should accompany all children under the age of 16 years.

- The number of stewards required – we recommend a minimum of two stewards per party (one at the front and the other at the rear) for the duration of the tour. Stewards should be able bodied and at least 18 years old
- The means of communication for stewards with those on the ground – to summon help in the event of an emergency
- The prevention of unauthorised access – to other high-level areas (for example, roofs, roof spaces, etc.) not on the tour and areas containing dangerous machinery
- The sequencing of tours – so that no new tour commences until all visitors on the previous tour have descended to the ground and have been accounted for
- Safe access to bell-ringing chambers – if this is included on the tour. You may also want to get the views of your bell-ringer Tower Captain on suitability and to ensure that the bells are rung down before any tour takes place. Members of the public may be admitted while ringing is taking place under the supervision and guidance of the Tower Captain or suitable deputy
- Any emergency procedures that may be required – for example, in the event that someone is taken ill or becomes claustrophobic and requires evacuation. You may need to discuss your arrangements with the emergency services
- Suspending tours in the event of inclement weather for example, high winds, ice, snow, heavy rain, etc.
- The provision of adequate storage arrangements – for example, pushchairs, large bags, etc. at ground level
- Any safety information required for visitors – to ensure their suitability to take part including any notices and warning signs advising of the physical effort that may be required. Stewards may need to be able to use their own judgement and decline those who they feel might ‘struggle’ with the challenge.

Making a start

Action

2. Ensure that the precautions you have identified are taken and remain in place for as long as necessary.

Make a note of any checks carried out to ensure these precautions are in place before any tour commences.

Guidance

3. Ensure that stewards are provided with any necessary information and training on the precautions to be taken.

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

The level of information and training required will vary depending on your particular circumstances and the precautions to be taken.

If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you determine what will be necessary.

4. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for managing safety during tower tours.

Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid.

Retain records of the notes you have made in steps one, two and three.

If you have prepared a health and safety policy, record these as part of it.

In the event of a claim, paperwork will be important, so you should retain the records mentioned.

Where you prepare other documentation, you should keep these as well. This could include information gathered at the scene of the accident (for example, sketches/photographs, witnesses' statements, etc.), investigation documents (such as an accident book), or specific health and safety documents (for example, risk assessments, records of maintenance, inspections and other checks, records of information and training provided, policy, etc.).



Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/managing-safety-at-your-church/>

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 report an incident involving an injury?

If an incident occurs that may result in a claim for injury, please retain any accident investigation records, e.g. accident book entry, photos etc. and contact our specialist claims team on **0345 603 8381** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm) for advice. Where you have received correspondence about a claim being made against you, it is important that you notify us immediately and email a copy to our experts on casualtyclaims@ecclesiastical.com.

Policy cover queries

For queries about your policy cover, call our specialist church team on **0345 777 3322** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm, excluding bank holidays) or email us at churchteam@ecclesiastical.com.

Alternatively, please visit www.ecclesiastical.com/church.

This guidance is provided for information purposes and is general and educational in nature. It should not be used as a substitute for taking professional advice on specific issues and should not be taken as providing legal advice on any of the topics addressed.



Proudly part of the BENEFACT GROUP 