

Church Guidance Note

Safety signs



Safety signs play an important role in warning of hazards or advising on what precautions need to be taken. They can take several forms. These include signboards, illuminated signs, acoustic signals (such as a warning sound, bell or pre-recorded evacuation message) or verbal communications given by others. We are used to seeing them wherever we go – in shops, offices, leisure centres, cinemas, hotels and a variety of other places we might visit. They are divided into categories according to the type of message they convey, and each assigned a specific format and set of colours.

Safety signs and signals have an equally important place in churches too. These can often be installed sympathetically, striking a balance between ensuring safety and maintaining the aesthetic of the building. For example, they can be hung with chains so that they do not spoil ornate architraves, or displayed on freestanding boards that can be put out when the church is open. It is important to note that some signs are required to be displayed by law.

Legal requirements

Generally, if someone is injured you may need to show that you have met your duty of care.

In addition to this, if you are an employer, you must comply with more specific health and safety law as well. This includes the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations.

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.

These require you to provide:

- Safety signs, where risk assessments (under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations) indicate that they are needed. For example, this may be to meet duties under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations etc.
- Fire safety signs in accordance with the requirements of your fire risk assessment
- Road traffic safety signs, where there is a risk from the presence or movement of traffic
- Relevant information and training for employees on the meaning of any safety signs or signals provided and the precautions to be taken where they are displayed.

These Regulations also detail requirements for signs including their size, colour, shape and format of any text. The use and maintenance of acoustic signals (including fire alarms) and illuminated signs are also covered. Permanent signs are necessary, except in cases where the workplace or hazard is temporary. There is no need to provide signs if they don't help reduce the risk, or if the risk is insignificant.

Even if you are not an employer, but control non-domestic premises, you may still have a duty to make sure the premises are safe. This includes the provision of any safety signs or signals where necessary. Further, you may have to provide these anyway to meet other legal duties placed on those other than employers. Examples include fire safety signs (under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order); asbestos warning signs (under the Control of Asbestos Regulations); no-smoking signs (under the Smoke-free (Signs) Regulations); and more generally under the Occupiers' Liability Act.

Hazards to look out for

Some of the typical hazards that may require signs include:

- Low ceilings or pipes running along ceilings where height restrictions apply and people are at risk of bumping their heads
- Areas where objects may fall onto people, e.g. in storage areas
- Non-obvious steps or sudden changes in floor height or level
- Temporary conditions that introduce hazards, e.g. icy weather, wet floors or contractors working overhead
- Larger than normal visitor numbers to your church who may not be familiar with the site.*

Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- Using safety signs to prohibit certain activities (e.g. smoking, access to prohibited areas); warning of certain hazards (e.g. obstacles, drops); mandate certain precautions (e.g. wearing safety harnesses); identify emergency escape routes (e.g. fire exit signs) or firefighting equipment and advise of the location of first aid facilities
- Using signs as a warning of any temporary hazards (e.g. whilst floor cleaning is taking place), ensuring that these are removed once the danger has passed
- Displaying additional, temporary signs for busy services (such as temporary emergency escape route signage to aid a swift evacuation)
- Training staff and volunteers to use some signs together (i.e. safety signs and verbal communication) for some occasions such as busy services with large numbers of people attending.*

*This list is not exhaustive.

Making a start

Action

1. **Walk around your church to check the suitability of existing safety signage or identify where additional ones are needed.**

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If you are an employer and need to complete formal risk assessments, these will help you identify circumstances where safety signs are required.

Remember, even if you are not an employer, but control non-domestic premises, you may still have to complete certain risk assessments. These might show that certain safety signs will need to be displayed. You may need to check any assessments (e.g. fire risk assessment; asbestos management plan etc.) you have made to see what exactly is required.

Check all areas including any boiler room, office, toilet and outdoor areas. Take care to avoid using too many signs in close proximity to each other. Signs are only effective if they can be clearly seen and properly understood. Too many signs together may cause confusion with the chance of important information being overlooked.

If your church is relatively small with a simple layout and few hazardous activities, you may not need much in the way of signs. However, for larger or multi-room church premises or those having a number of hazardous activities, a range of signs might be necessary. Remember, you must only use safety signs if there is a significant risk that can't be avoided or controlled in another way.

2. **Display the required safety signs, making sure that they are properly maintained.**

You may need to check them periodically, making sure they remain legible and prominently displayed.

In some cases, you may also need to make a note of any checks or inspections you make.

Any signs provided must comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations. These are outlined in Appendix A and further information is available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.htm.

In some cases, more than one type of sign may be necessary. For example, an illuminated warning sign indicating a specific risk combined with an acoustic alarm meaning 'general danger' to alert people.

All safety signs must be properly maintained. This may involve routine cleaning; checks to see that they are in good condition; regular inspection of illuminated signs; and testing of acoustic signals. Damaged or worn signs should be replaced and any obstructions removed. 'Home-made' signs are best avoided.

All safety signs should function in the event of a power failure unless the hazard is itself eliminated by the power failure. Usually, this means that they are visible either with the aid of emergency lighting that is provided or being made of a phosphorescent material.

Making a start

Action

- 3. Make sure that employees understand what any safety signs and signals mean, providing them with any necessary information and training.**

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

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It is important that employees understand the meaning of any signs or signals seen or heard during their work. Although the meaning of most safety signs is commonly understood, some employees (particularly new or inexperienced ones) may not be so familiar with them. Therefore, it is important that the meaning of any sign is clearly explained, and that employees are aware of the consequences of not following them.

Generally, for many small churches, the type of signs in use are likely to be familiar to people, and in common use, but you should check to make sure they are understood. For any arrangements where you have to use temporary signs, it is important that people know when and how they are supposed to use them.

More detailed training may be required in churches where visitor numbers are much larger or where specific hazards arise which are out of the ordinary.

- 4. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for using safety signs or signals at your church.**

Keep the notes you have made in the steps above.

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.



Safety signs and signals must comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations. Examples of the specified categories are shown below

Details	Meaning or Purpose	Example	Instruction or Information
Circular shape Black pictogram Red edging and diagonal line	Prohibition sign		Signs prohibiting behaviour likely to increase or cause danger
Triangular shape Black pictogram Yellow background	Warning sign		Signs giving warning of a hazard or danger
Circular shape White pictogram Blue background	Mandatory Sign		Signs making certain actions or behaviour compulsory
Rectangular or square shape White pictogram Green background	Emergency escape First aid sign		Signs giving information on emergency exits, first aid or rescue facilities
Rectangular or square shape White pictogram Red background	Firefighting sign		Provides information on the identification or location of firefighting equipment

Further information is available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.htm

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at

https://ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/articles/?q=&facet_productService=&facet_articleType=35515

Further guidance and resources are also available at:

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.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.

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.



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