



How to plan and hold an event safely

Factsheet 4 - Emergency planning and fire safety



Emergency Planning

You should consider what you would do in the unlikely event of an emergency. It is best practice to nominate someone who would take the lead in the case of an emergency. The Trust carry out building and fire risk assessments for each church which will provide the basis for any emergency plan. You can ask your LCO to see these. It doesn't need to be a complicated document, you just need to think about:

- Who is the person at the event who makes decisions in an emergency (e.g. to evacuate the building, or to stop the event)?
- How would you contact the emergency services? Do you have phone signal?
- Would an ambulance or fire engine be able to find the church easily? You could use [What3Words](#) to help them locate your church.
- Where is your evacuation point?
- How would you evacuate disabled people or people with limited mobility?
- Do you have a first aid kit available?

We recommend that as part of the welcome to your event you point out all the fire exits to the congregation or audience as they may not be familiar with all the doors in the church, particularly if a door is not normally used.

Maximum Capacity

For more information about maximum capacity see [How to plan and hold an event safely - Introduction](#).

Every church managed by Churches Conservation Trust has a maximum capacity set. This is the number of people that the church can hold safely. This isn't calculated on the amount of seats in the church but how easily it would be to evacuate safely and quickly in the event of an emergency which may include fire. The amount is calculated by the number of doors there are in a church that can be used. If there is only one door the capacity will normally be 60. Larger numbers can be permitted if there are more exits. There may be areas, such as galleries, where the exit is so difficult that we do not allow their use because safe evacuation would be difficult.

Please check with your Local Community Officer (LCO) what the capacity of your church is and consider how you will control the number of people to your event, particularly if it is un-ticketed. Ask your LCO if there are any recommendations concerning events in the church in the fire risk assessment that you should know about.

You must also think about how you are going to keep to this number. For example, you could repeat the event, to accommodate all the people who wish to attend. Selling tickets through an online ticketing system can help you manage the audience numbers.

You may want to place a person on the door with a 'clicker', to count the number of people inside the building.



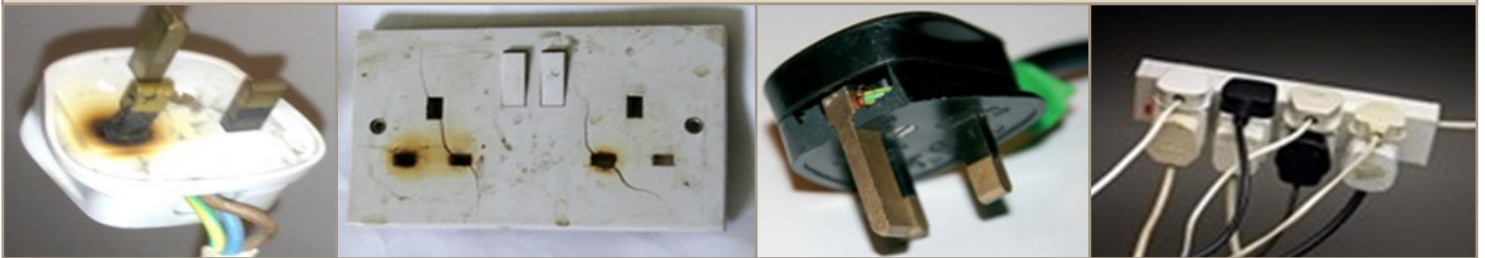
Fire

Reducing Risk

We all want to run a safe event and considering how you will reduce the risk of a fire at your event should be considered in your risk assessment. A fire needs fuel, heat and oxygen. We can't remove oxygen from the atmosphere, but we can take away the heat and fuel. Risk can be reduced by:

- Not using naked flames where possible (see our [Candle Policy](#) for the safe use of candles)
- Ensuring that all candles are completely extinguished at the end of the event
- Ensuring that all electrical appliances have had a recent Portable Appliance Test (PAT) and / or have been checked for any evidence of faults such as frayed cable, damaged plugs or sockets (see images below)
- Not overloading power sockets
- Not allowing rubbish to build up, as this can provide fuel in the event of a fire breaking out
- Checking that all available doors are unlocked, open and there are no obstructions to the exits

Check for damage or overloading like that shown in these photos



Fire Wardens / Marshals

Fire wardens or fire marshals help to guide your audience out of the church quickly and safely in the case of an evacuation.

If you have sidespersons or stewards available you can use them, otherwise you can appoint people specifically for this role.

They need to know where the evacuation point is, how to alert people in the case of a fire, and be familiar with the door nearest to them (including whether it opens inwards or outwards). They should be prepared to quickly open the door, in case of evacuation.





Naked flames

In general, naked flames should be avoided. If this is necessary for your event please discuss with your Local Community Officer who may seek further advice from the Conservation Team. Our [Candles Policy](#) gives advice on the use of candles.

You will need to consider the additional risk that naked flames pose and how you will mitigate that risk and record it in your risk assessment. If you cannot do this sufficiently to reduce the risk then you need to reconsider their use.

Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are designed to be used to facilitate the safe evacuation of people from a building, not to fight fires. Most of our churches do not have fire extinguishers. Depending on your event your risk assessment may conclude that fire extinguishers are required. It is possible to hire fire extinguishers, for a single event, from companies who supply and maintain them.

If you will be using candles at your event, you might like to consider having buckets of sand or water or a fire safety blanket available to extinguish candles.

Battery powered candles

If you use battery powered candles please be aware that button batteries pose a fatality risk, if swallowed. Consider where you place battery powered candles and how you dispose of batteries (especially button batteries).

Smoke machines / dry ice / pyrotechnics / helium balloons

We do not permit smoke machines, dry ice, pyrotechnics, or helium balloons in any of our churches. Please discuss other unusual requests with your LCO.