



# GUIDE TO EMERGENCY PLANS AT CHURCH

Having a Fire and Emergency Evacuation Plan in place at your church is both crucial and a legal requirement. It is important for churches to consider their emergency plans and procedures for weekend and weekday gatherings.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AT CHURCH?

Senior Leadership of the church is legally responsible for ensuring the safety of everyone in the facilities. This includes employees, volunteers, contractors, church members and visitors. Whilst they may delegate tasks to the Safety Officer or Safety Team, the legal responsibility for ensuring a safe environment rests with the senior leadership.

## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

An Emergency Management Plan is a written set of instructions that outlines what people should do in the event of an emergency such as a fire, explosion, medical emergency, bomb threat or armed robbery.

The aim of an Emergency Management Plan is to get people out of the facility in an orderly way as soon as possible so that they are not in danger and so that they are out of the way of emergency response services. It is important to be prepared to ensure everyone can evacuate quickly and safely. Having a plan and practicing your plan will greatly increase the chances of a successful outcome during an emergency.

Every church has different people, roles, facilities and risks. Your plan should be tailored to your church and appropriate to the number and type of occupants. The complexity of the plan depends on the size of your building, and the number of members that attend your programs, services and events. Therefore, it is best for each local church to devise their own plan that is specific to its needs.

Doing a practical assessment of hazards associated with your church activities – and the possible consequences of an incident occurring as a result of those hazards – will help you prepare a plan.

External hazards may also affect the safety of the workplace – for example, a chemical storage across the road. They too should be considered. The Emergency Management Plan should be simple enough for everyone to understand, and practical enough to accomplish your tasks for each type of emergency.

### Use the following checklist to help develop your plan:

- Evacuation Diagrams
- Contacting 000
- Specific address of your facility
- Allocation of fire warden duties (i.e. deacons, ushers, leaders, etc.) including names of wardens, and their specific jobs and areas of responsibility
- Contact numbers of wardens for emergency response personnel
- Encouragement for all people to remain calm and orderly
- Clear advice not to waste time collecting or going back for valuables
- Designated Assembly Areas which are easily accessible and a safe distance from the emergency shutting down of air conditioning units and heaters
- Provision of first aid kits and trained people
- Specific plans for children (e.g. sign in, roll call, parent retrieval)
- Specific plans for members with disabilities

## EVACUATION DIAGRAMS

Evacuation Diagrams should include floor plans with specific evacuation routes for each major portion of your facility i.e. the chapel/auditorium, Sunday school rooms, offices, playground, etc as well as the locations of firefighting equipment, exits and assembly points and written instructions on who to call in an emergency.

It is recommended that you use a professional to draw these up and ensure they meet the Australian Standards

(e.g. [https://www.safetygraphics.com.au/services/emergency-evacuation-diagrams/?gclid=EAlalQobChMlrWDrZb26QIVDA4rCh2v5gweEAAYASAAEgl\\_WfD\\_BwE](https://www.safetygraphics.com.au/services/emergency-evacuation-diagrams/?gclid=EAlalQobChMlrWDrZb26QIVDA4rCh2v5gweEAAYASAAEgl_WfD_BwE)  
Or <https://www.statcomsystems.com.au/> or similar)

## RUNNING AN EVACUATION DRILL

For many churches the fact that they are required to do an evacuation drill is not understood or is conveniently ignored!

It may seem like too much work, overkill for the building or size of the congregation, too disruptive to the service or be too difficult to organise. None of these reasons are legitimate reason for not doing a drill.

### **When planning your drill, consider the following:**

- Let people know it is coming and what it is for – it doesn't have to be a surprise.
- Encourage people to participate and allow people to plan to be there. You want to have the most amount of people there so that your drill is as real as possible.
- Let people know it is not a real emergency
- Plan to run it during good weather (as much as is possible) •
- Include the children and explain what you are doing and why in a way that they will understand
- Ensure that senior leadership are actively involved – this sends a clear message that the church takes its responsibilities seriously.
- Do it after a service or members meeting – don't interrupt worship as this will sit negatively with some people.
- Review how it went and feed the result back to people. How long did it take to evacuate all the building? Were all areas cleared or were people left behind?! What can be done to improve?

For more information on fire and evacuation, consult your local fire authority (DFES), local council or shire, or an essential safety measures service provider.

## EVACUATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The evacuation of persons with disabilities can prove to be a challenging task for worship facilities. Not every emergency that involves moving members with disabilities can be planned for, however churches should anticipate the need to effectively evacuate members with disabilities.

### **The following should be considered when evacuating members with disabilities:**

- Identify members with special needs and mobility issues within your congregation
- Consult these individuals, if possible, about their special needs and how to best provide assistance.
- Ensure adequate assistive devices are available for your facility should the need arise, such as wheel chairs, stair lifts or chairs depending on the size and configuration of your facility.
- Use the buddy system if possible; consider using ushers or other able-bodied members. This should be arranged before an incident and would be for regular attendees. Consider whether one or two buddies is more appropriate for each person.

## BASICS OF FIRE SAFETY AND ESSENTIAL SAFETY MEASURES IN YOUR BUILDINGS

Building owners are required to maintain safety fittings, equipment and safety features, or “essential safety measures” to ensure that the safety systems dealing predominantly with fire situations within the building remain at the required operational level throughout the life of the building. There are different obligations depending on when the building was built. Many churches use the Risk Management Redbook to do this. Some basic requirements on churches include but are not limited to:

- Place the correct type of fire equipment where it can be accessed quickly if needed (e.g. fire extinguisher, hose and blanket). Ensure extinguishers are placed away from heat sources. If you are unsure about what you need, contact your local fire authority or fire equipment supplier for advice.
- Ensure fire equipment is tested every six months by your local fire authority or fire equipment supplier to make sure it operates correctly.
- Train employees in how to use fire equipment and know what type of fire extinguishers to use for different types of fires.
- Write an emergency evacuation plan of how people should evacuate the workplace and where they should assemble if there is an emergency.
- Display the emergency evacuation plan diagram where everyone can see it and practice your plan with your employees at regular intervals, for example, every six months. Make sure each poster clearly indicates where you are, where the exits are and where the assembly area is.
- Make sure emergency exits and the paths to them and from them are unlocked, not blocked and exit signs are illuminated.
- If you have battery backup for illuminated exits signs, test the battery power regularly.
- Install hard wired smoke alarms in the kitchen and near heavy loaded electrical equipment (e.g. sound desk). Smoke alarms should be tested yearly (e.g. on 1st April)
- Install Residual Current Devices (RCDs). This is a device that quickly breaks an electrical circuit to prevent a spark or serious harm from electric shock.

Note: If you are in a multi-tenanted building, make sure the building manager runs practice evacuations for all tenants as part of your lease arrangements. It is advisable to receive the hirers evacuation plan as part of the hire agreement.

## FIRST AID:

First Aid is the emergency care of injured or sick persons. It aims to preserve life, promote recovery, and prevent the injury or illness becoming worse.

Every church must ensure that an adequate number of people are trained to administer first aid. This includes when staff or volunteers are working at the church premises during the week as well as during services, camps, meetings and all other church programs and activities. At minimum there should be at least one first aider for every 50 people. All staff and volunteers at churches must be able to access a first aid kit. This will require at least one clearly signed and recognisable first aid kit to be provided at every church.

Your First Aid Kit should be appropriate for the size and type of activities being run at your church.

COCWA recommends contacting St John Ambulance or registered first aid kit suppliers/trainers for more information regarding buying kits, restocking contents and getting First Aid Training.

Kits should be restocked immediately after use and regularly maintained (check contents at least once every 12 months). Analgesics or other medication is not permitted to be part of a first aid kit.

Records are to be kept of any treatment given. In the case of an incident or ‘near miss’ event an Incident Form is to be completed and kept on file.