



LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

FIRE SAFETY GUIDANCE NOTE

Fire Precautions in Places of Public Worship

Number:
GN58

The London Fire Commissioner (the Commissioner) is the fire and rescue authority for London. The Commissioner is responsible for enforcing the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (The Order) in London.

This Guidance Note provides advice on fire safety issues in places of worship, churches etc.

This Note is one of a series produced by the Commissioner to provide advice on various aspects of fire safety. If you require any further guidance on the advice given or require advice on another topic please visit your local Fire Safety Office, telephone 020 8555 1200 and ask for the nearest Fire Safety Office, or visit our web site at <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk>

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document has been prepared by the Fire Safety Regulation Department, London Fire Brigade (LFB).
- 1.2 The purpose of this Guidance Note is to provide basic fire safety advice for any person responsible for managing a place of public religious worship, be it purpose built or converted for such use.
- 1.3 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies to places of public worship. Further advice on these regulations can be obtained from our Guidance Note No 66.

2 OTHER AUTHORITIES YOU MAY NEED TO CONSULT

- 2.1 If the premises are to be newly constructed or altered in any way, Building Regulation approval may be required from the local authority Building Control Office.
- 2.2 If the premises are used for other purposes e.g., theatrical productions, or music and dancing or for showing films, a higher standard of fire safety may be required for all or part of the building and you should therefore consult the department within your local authority that deals with the Licensing Act 2003.
- 2.3 If the premises are used for children's nursery facilities or catering for large events then you may need to contact OFSTED, Social Services, or Environmental Health Departments at the local authority.

3 MEANS OF ESCAPE

- 3.1 The basic principle of means of escape is that persons should be able to safely leave the premises by moving away from a fire to a place of safety.
- 3.2 The premises, be they a church, room or hall used to house the congregation, should therefore be provided with sufficient exits giving access to escape routes capable of accommodating the maximum congregation. These means of escape should take account of the loss of one exit or route as a result of any fire.
- 3.3 All exit routes must be left free of obstruction, floors/floor coverings maintained in good condition and such routes should be adequately lit especially where there is a change of floor level.
- 3.4 Where ever possible, exit doors should open outwards and be clearly signed. These requirements may be relaxed provided that:
 - those supervising the activity and others assisting them are trained in the action to be taken in case of fire and the evacuation procedure for the building, and
 - the building is of ground floor only; and
 - the available exits are of sufficient width to accommodate the number of people who may be present within the required evacuation time, and
 - the exit doors lead directly to the open air enabling people to leave the building and its precincts.
- 3.5 At all times that the premises are occupied, all doors from the area in use must be easily openable without the use of a key, they should preferably be fitted with a "push bar" type of fastening unless the numbers of people required to use them is less than 50, in which case a single, simple fastening available without the use of a key e.g., a "Yale" type lock may be acceptable.
- 3.6 Exit routes should be clearly marked to enable people unfamiliar with the premises to locate exits in the event of a fire.

- 3.7 In a single stairway building, it is necessary to ensure that a fire on the lower floor(s) could not prevent people escaping from an upper floor. This can be achieved by the provision of an additional stairway to the upper floors (totally independent of the first stairway) or by ensuring that the existing stairway is enclosed by materials, having a fire resistance of 30 minutes and that all doors opening onto the stairway are fire doors rated at 30 minutes fitted with a self-closing device.
- 3.8 Powered stair-lifts should not be installed without advice from the LFB as they may significantly reduce the width of stairs when in use.
- 3.9 Further advice is available from the guides and publications detailed in Section 13 (Bibliography) of this Guidance Note.

4 HOUSEKEEPING

- 4.1 Strict housekeeping is essential as accumulations of rubbish or combustibles can present the ideal place for a fire to start.
- 4.2 If smoking is allowed in any area it should be controlled and adequate ashtrays provided. Ashtrays should be periodically emptied into a metal bin with lid provided solely for this purpose.
- 4.3 Areas used for storage should not be accessible to the public. Doors to stores should, where possible, be kept locked shut.
- 4.4 Candles and matches should be kept in a secure store when not in use. Candles should not be left burning when the premises are not in use or in any unsupervised part of the building.

5 FIRE FIGHTING EQUIPMENT

- 5.1 Insurance companies usually require adequate portable fire extinguishers and their advice should be followed.
- 5.2 As a general rule, extinguishers are to be hung on brackets near exits and tested by a recognised company annually. Whenever an extinguisher is used it is to be re-charged and put back into service immediately.
- 5.3 Further information on fire fighting equipment is available in the LFB's Fire Safety Guidance Note No.8.

6 ELECTRICAL

- 6.1 Statistics show that around 20% of fires in places of worship are caused by electrical faults.
- 6.2 Electrical work should only be undertaken by a qualified electrician. Wiring should be fully tested by a competent person every five years and a certificate issued. Most authorities recommend that wiring should be replaced every 20 years.
- 6.3 Socket adapters should never be used. Electrical leads should not trail across floors or be allowed to come into contact with anything that could damage or fray the insulation. Electrical plugs should be fitted with the appropriate fuse, its rating determined by the appliance that it serves.

7 LIGHTING

- 7.1 All areas used by people resorting in the building must be adequately lit. It is also recommended that stairways, passages and large halls are provided with simple emergency lighting in case of power failure.

8 HEATING SYSTEMS

- 8.1 All heating systems must be maintained in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

- 8.2 Radiant heaters should be adequately guarded and no storage allowed in close proximity.
- 8.3 Portable heaters are not recommended for use in places of worship. If, however, it is decided to use such heaters the following special precautions should be taken when they are in use. They should be re-filled outside of the building by a competent person. Wherever possible they should be fixed in position and guarded, to ensure they cannot be inadvertently moved to come into contact with drapes, furnishings or other combustibles.

9 SEATING

- 9.1 Seating in large halls should be fixed in position with seats interlocked together in rows. There should be not less than 305mm between rows and gangways to be 1100mm wide. No seat should be more than 3.5m from a gangway.
- 9.2 Additional spacing may be required to provide accommodation/access for wheelchair users or persons with a disability.

10 SECURITY

- 10.1 Statistics indicate that 70% of fires in places of worship are caused deliberately. For this reason it is also essential that the advice of the local Police Crime Prevention Officer is obtained. This advice is free.

11 ACTION TO TAKE ON DISCOVERING A FIRE

- (a) Raise the alarm, instructing everyone to leave the building immediately by the nearest available exit.
- (b) Call the Fire Brigade.
- (c) If the fire is small attempt to fight the fire using the portable extinguishers, but only if this can be done without risk.
- (d) Do not allow people to re-enter the building until the Fire Brigade have checked and confirmed that it safe to do so.
- (e) A responsible person should meet the Fire Brigade and advise them of the situation.

12 FIRE ALARMS

- 12.1 There is no requirement for most places of worship to have a fire alarm system, however, the advantages are such that many are having them installed
- 12.2 A relatively simple fire detection system is capable of detecting a fire in its early stages and thereby enabling an early evacuation of the premises when they are occupied. Some systems are capable of being connected to a central receiving station, whereby the fire brigade can be called automatically.
- 12.3 In places of worship which consist mainly of one large hall and in which people are led in an act of worship, the requirement for a fire warning system will be met if it is ensured that the following arrangements are in place:-
- (a) in the event of fire the person discovering it tells the person leading the worship who instructs the congregation to leave immediately; and
 - (b) stewards immediately go to designated exits, open the doors and assist people out of the building; and
 - (c) any area of normal or high fire risk is separated from other parts of the main building by fire-resisting construction or is fitted with automatic fire detection capable of giving warning of fire throughout the main building.

- 12.4 If people may be in the building when an act of worship is not taking place, a responsible person should be designated to initiate the fire evacuation procedure and all staff or officials present should assist with the evacuation.

13 BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 13.1 Detailed guidance on the various standards listed in the guidance note may be obtained from the following bibliography.

AVAILABLE FROM	TITLE
LFEPA Switchboard: 020 8555 1200	Guidance Note 8 – Hand Held Portable Firefighting Equipment
The Stationery Office (Counter Service) 123 Kingsway London WC2B 6PQ Telephone: 020 7242 6393 Fax: 020 7242 6394 Web: www.tso.co.uk ALSO: The Stationery Office (Mail, Telephone & Fax Orders) PO Box 29 Norwich NR3 1GN Telephone: 0870 600 5522 Fax orders: 0870 600 5533	Fire safety in small and medium places of assembly ISBN-13: 978 1 85112 820 4 Fire safety in large places of assembly ISBN-13: 978 1 85112 821 1 Fire safety at outdoor events ISBN-13: 978 1 85112 823 5 Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Means of Escape for Disabled People ISBN: 978 1 85112 873 7

The above publications are current at the time of preparation of this Guidance Note, (see date at foot of last page).

The "Fire Safety" guide listed above may also be downloaded free of charge from the Fire Safety Law Section of the CLG website at: www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities