Church Health and Safety Policy Guidance Note

Purpose of this Guidance Note

The purpose of this guidance note is to help your church leadership team or trustees develop and apply the Health & Safety policy in a way that is practical, proportionate, and rooted in your church context.

It is designed to support churches in making wise decisions that protect people and enable ministry to flourish.

As Baptist churches, we believe our buildings are more than bricks and mortar—they are places of worship, refuge, and fellowship.

They host everything from Sunday services and prayer meetings to youth groups, food banks, and community outreach.

Keeping these spaces safe is part of our stewardship and reflects our commitment to loving one another well.

We must ensure that our buildings remain safe spaces where people can come and worship God freely, without fear or danger.

Health & Safety is not just a legal duty—it is part of our pastoral care and our witness to the community.

Information About the Author and Disclaimer

This Guidance Note and the accompanying Template Health and Safety Policy have been prepared on behalf of the Baptist Union of Scotland ("BUS") by a member of one of our BUS churches who has significant experience in Health & Safety, and who is also a Chartered Member of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

It is hoped that churches will find the Template Policy and the Guidance Notes to be helpful. However, nothing contained in the Template Policy and/or the Guidance Notes should be regarded as containing specific advice to any particular church. Each church is responsible for deciding on its own Health and Safety Policy, and should take whatever advice it considers to be necessary in that connection. Neither the author of the Template Policy and the Guidance Notes nor the BUS can accept any liability arising out of the use by a church of the Template Policy and/or the Guidance Notes.

Baptist-Specific Considerations

Baptist churches are independent and self-governing, often led by a team of trustees and supported by volunteers. While many roles—such as youth leaders, caretakers, and ministry coordinators—are filled by volunteers, most churches will have at least one paid employee, typically the minister or pastor.

This means your church is legally considered an employer under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, and you must meet the duties that apply to employers.

Under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, churches with employees must ensure the health, safety, and welfare of staff (Section 2) and protect everyone else—volunteers, visitors, and the congregation—from risks arising from church activities (Section 3).

Employees & volunteers must be provided with a safe environment, clear guidance, and appropriate training for the roles they carry out.

The law expects that volunteers are treated with the same level of care as employees when it comes to matters of health and safety.

More broadly, churches have a legal **and** moral **duty of care** to every person who enters the building, whether to worship, attend a group, or participate in community activities.

This means ensuring the premises are safe, well-maintained, and suitable for the range of uses they support.

A hazard left unaddressed doesn't just risk legal consequences, it undermines the trust and wellbeing of the very people the church seeks to serve.

Key reminders:

- **Assign roles clearly**: Even if informal, make sure volunteers know what's expected of them.
- **Include volunteers in risk assessments**: Especially for activities like children's work, catering, or maintenance.
- **Provide basic training**: For fire safety, safeguarding, or manual handling where relevant.
- **Keep communication open**: Volunteers should know how to report hazards or concerns.
- **Regularly inspect the building**: From trip hazards to fire exits, proactive checks help prevent accidents.

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Tailoring the Policy for your Church

Updating the Header

The policy template includes a placeholder for your church name in the document header.

To update this:

- Double-click the header area at the top of the page.
- Replace **[Insert Church Name]** with the name of your church.
- Click anywhere outside the header to return to the main document. This ensures your church name appears consistently across all pages.

Updating Section 2.0 – Organisation and Responsibility

This section outlines the key roles and responsibilities for health and safety within your church. It is presented as a table for clarity and ease of reference.
When tailoring this section:

- Review each role listed in the table and ensure it reflects your church's structure. For example, if your church does not have a formal leadership team, you may wish to assign responsibilities to trustees or a designated coordinator.
- Nominate a Health & Safety Lead—this could be a minister, trustee, or volunteer with relevant experience. Their role is to oversee inspections, risk assessments, incident reporting, and policy reviews.
- Ensure safeguarding responsibilities are assigned to a trained Safeguarding Officer, especially if your church runs children's or vulnerable adult ministries.
- Clarify expectations for employees and volunteers, including training, reporting hazards, and using protective equipment.
- Include contractors and visitors—even occasional contractors must comply with safety standards, and visitors should be encouraged to act safely and report concerns.

  You may also wish to add or remove rows depending on your church's activities. For example, if your church regularly hosts external events, you might include a role for an Events Coordinator.

Updating Section 3 – Arrangements

3.1 Accident Reporting

Tailoring Tip: Specify where your accident book is kept (e.g., church office, vestry).

Action: Ensure someone is responsible for maintaining records and reporting under RIDDOR if they are applicable.

3.2 Asbestos

Tailoring Tip: If your building was constructed before 2000, you must assess for asbestos. If it was built after 2000 this section can be deleted or blanked out.

Action: Record the date of your last asbestos survey and who conducted it.

3.3 Church Buildings

Tailoring Tip: Include inspection frequency and who carries them out (e.g., property committee). Please remember to remove reference to lightening conductor if your church does not have one (Some churches still have existing steeples and lightening conductors)

Action: Note any known issues (e.g., cracked windows, loose tiles) and planned repairs.

3.4 Church Grounds

Tailoring Tip: Identify who is responsible for grounds maintenance and tree inspections. Remove anything that is not relevant to your church i.e. headstones or boundary walls for example.

Action: Ensure regular inspections are carried out and that any issues with trees, walls, or pathways are addressed promptly to prevent harm

3.5 Contractors

Tailoring Tip: List any regular contractors and ensure they provide insurance and risk assessments.

Action: Keep a contractor checklist of regularly used contractors

3.6 Construction Work

Tailoring Tip: Note any planned renovations and whether CDM Regulations apply.

Action: Assign a project lead to oversee safety compliance.

3.7 Display Screen Equipment

Tailoring Tip: Only relevant if staff/volunteers use computers regularly.

Action: Provide workstation assessments and offer eye tests if needed.

3.8 Electrical Safety

Tailoring Tip: Record the date of your last “5 Year Fixed Wire Test” and PAT testing.

Action: Assign someone to oversee electrical safety and maintain records.

3.9 Environment and Sustainability

Tailoring Tip: Include any recycling schemes, energy-saving measures, or green initiatives.

Action: Consider adding environmental goals to your annual review.

3.10 Event Safety

Tailoring Tip: Identify typical events (e.g., fairs, concerts, services) and associated risks.

Action: Use a standard event risk assessment template and assign event stewards.

3.11 Fire Safety

Tailoring Tip: Identify who is responsible for fire safety and evacuation procedures.

Action: Ensure fire risk assessments are up to date and fire drills are conducted regularly and fire alarms / smoke detectors etc are tested regularly & recorded.

3.12 First Aid

Tailoring Tip: List trained first aiders and the locations of the First Aid Kit

Action: Maintain stocked first aid kits and display emergency contact numbers.

3.13 Gas Safety

Tailoring Tip: Include details of any gas appliances and servicing schedules if relevant.

Action: Use Gas Safe registered engineers for inspections and repairs.

3.14 Hazardous Substances (COSHH)

Tailoring Tip: Identify cleaning products or chemicals used within the building.

Action: Maintain COSHH assessments and ensure safe storage and usage.

3.15 Information, Instruction and Training

Tailoring Tip: List required training for staff and volunteers.

Action: Keep training records and schedule refresher sessions as needed.

3.16 Lifting Equipment

Tailoring Tip: Identify any lifting equipment used (e.g. staging, furniture).

Action: Train staff in manual handling and inspect equipment regularly.

3.17 Lighting

Tailoring Tip: Identify who is responsible for checking lighting throughout the church, including external areas, stairwells, and emergency lighting. Consider the needs of elderly or visually impaired congregants when assessing adequacy.

Action: Ensure regular inspections are carried out to confirm all lighting is functional and sufficient. Replace faulty bulbs promptly and follow safe procedures when working at height. Emergency lighting should be tested in accordance with legal requirements.

3.18 Lone Working

Tailoring Tip: Consider when staff or volunteers may be alone on site.

Action: Implement check-in procedures where lone workers notify someone when they arrive / leave church premises, keep mobile phones charged etc, consider lone working alarms if appropriate.

3.19 Manual Handling

Tailoring Tip: Relevant for moving chairs, tables, or equipment.

Action: Provide manual handling training and encourage team lifting where appropriate.

3.20 Oil Storage

Tailoring Tip: Identify where oil is stored and who is responsible for monitoring tanks and bunds.

Action: Check tanks regularly for leaks and ensure containment measures are in place and maintained.

3.21 Plant and Machinery

Tailoring Tip: Identify who is authorised to operate machinery and ensure they are trained and competent.

Action: Inspect equipment before use and report any defects immediately to prevent accidents.

3.22 Preparation of Food

Tailoring Tip: Identify who oversees food preparation and ensure they understand hygiene requirements.

Action: Keep food areas clean and ensure anyone handling food has basic hygiene awareness.

3.23 Risk Assessments

Tailoring Tip: Include who completes them and how often.

Action: Use standard templates and review assessments annually or after incidents.

3.24 Safeguarding

Tailoring Tip: Identify who your Safeguarding Officer is and ensure they are trained and accessible. If your church has a separate safeguarding policy the wording in this section could be deleted and "Please refer to our Safeguarding Policy" could be inserted (or similar)

Action: Make sure all staff and volunteers working with vulnerable groups are DBS-checked and know how to report concerns

3.25 Slips, Trips and Falls

Tailoring Tip: Identify high-risk areas (e.g. entrances, kitchens).

Action: Keep walkways clear, use non-slip mats, and repair uneven surfaces.

3.26 Water Hygiene / Legionella

Tailoring Tip: Identify any water systems that are infrequently used or pose a risk of Legionella.

Action: Carry out regular flushing and temperature checks and arrange professional assessments if needed.

3.27 Working at Height

Tailoring Tip: Identify tasks that involve working at height and who is authorised to carry them out.

Action: Ensure suitable equipment is used and that work is planned and supervised to prevent falls.

3.28 Work Equipment

Tailoring Tip: Identify what equipment is used regularly and who is responsible for its maintenance.

Action: Check equipment before use and keep records of inspections and repairs.