



ECCLESIASTICAL

INSURANCE YOU CAN BELIEVE IN

**Self-assessment –
How Safe is Your
Place of Worship**

At Ecclesiastical, we believe that it’s important for places of worship to undertake risk assessments and to record all significant findings. The detailed Guidance Notes that accompany this document can be of great help. Please note that while the items outlined are integral to any assessment, they are included for guidance purposes only and should not be considered as an exhaustive list.

I. Are all electrical systems, including wiring, switchgear and any fixed machinery such as organ blower motors and all portable electrical appliances in good condition and properly maintained? (See Guidance Notes, Section 1.1)

All electrical installations and electrical equipment (including portable appliances) in use within the premises must be installed and maintained in accordance with relevant National Standards, the *Canadian Electrical Code*, and applicable Provincial and Municipal Building Codes/Standards so as to prevent danger.

In order to ensure that electrical systems are safe and maintained in good order, routine inspections must be carried out by a suitably qualified and competent person licensed by the province of jurisdiction.

For all electrical construction and maintenance work carried out in a province in Canada, a licensed electrician or supervised apprentices working under the *Electrical Installation and Inspection Act* for the province of jurisdiction must be employed.

Electrical Test certificate(s) must be issued upon completion of said inspections and any subsequent remedial work which may be required must be carried out.

It is normal practice to recommend that fixed electrical systems and electrical equipment in premises such as yours be inspected and tested every five years.

Records must be kept of all inspections, examinations and maintenance carried out.

Any defective wiring or equipment must be brought up to the relevant standard required under the Municipal, and/or Provincial, and/or National Codes.

For general reference, electrical rooms or panel areas must be kept clear of combustibles and items in general that are too close to the panel and may represent a fire hazard or impede access to the panel. An electrical room or panel area must not be used for general storage. *Canadian Electrical Code*, Rule 26-350(2) states: “Vaults shall not be used for storage purposes”.

You must keep a 1 metre (3.28 feet) clear working space around electrical panels and equipment. *Canadian Electrical Code*, Rule 2-308 states that, “a minimum working space of 1 metre with secure footing shall be provided and maintained about electrical equipment such as switchboards, panel boards, control panels, and motor control centres that are enclosed in metal.”

Circuit breakers should not be locked or taped open. A breaker responds to heat buildup within the wiring and must be allowed to move freely in order to prevent a fire due to overload.

YES	NO	N/A

2. Do you have procedures in place for the vetting of persons working with children, young people and vulnerable adults? (See Guidance Notes, Section 2.1)

It is most important that adequate safeguards are adopted and adhered to when selecting persons wishing to work with children and/or vulnerable adults.

We strongly recommend reference, police and background checks be completed in all instances where new staff and volunteers want to be involved with children.

3. Do you have procedures in place for fetes and other outdoor activities? (See Guidance Notes, Sections 2.2, 2.3)

There are various hazards associated with such things as bouncy castles, fireworks and charity walks. Do you have appropriate protocols in place for any events being staged at your facility?

4. Do you have a system in place for the recording of accidents and the reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences? (See Guidance Notes, Section 3)

We strongly recommend your place of worship adopt a formal accident/incident reporting policy. Where possible, you should obtain written statements from any witnesses and record relevant contact information.

A sample accident/incident report form is available from Ecclesiastical.

5. Do you have formal safety procedures in place if your facility is used for public performances and for major services throughout the year? (See Guidance Notes, Section 7.1)

If your place of worship is regularly used for concerts and services, a written policy should be in place detailing matters such as evacuation procedures, training of stewards, volunteers and others in the use of fire extinguishers and other equipment. Consideration should also be given to the installation of an automatic fire alarm system and a public address system for giving instructions in the event of an emergency.

6. Have you carried out an assessment and survey, if necessary, to determine the location and condition of any asbestos and prepared a management plan? (See Guidance Notes, Section 7.2)

Some places of worship may still have asbestos used as insulation, pipe lagging and fire protection. It is essential that the material be in good repair, with no breaks or exposed areas which may be hazardous to the health of visitors and contractors. A management plan can then be implemented to enable the asbestos to remain safely on the premises, or to be removed.

Asbestos can only be removed by a contractor licensed to carry out asbestos abatement within the required guidelines for your province and/or municipality.

YES	NO	N/A

7. Have assessments been carried out on areas where there is the risk of falls from a height and appropriate measures taken? (See Guidance Notes, Section 7.3)

Careful consideration must be given before allowing persons to visit any high level areas of your building. Adequate signage and guidelines must be drawn up.

Balconies, galleries and choir lofts should have railings installed which meet the minimum height requirements of your province of jurisdiction, and those areas not meeting the prescribed height should have restricted access until the situation has been rectified.

Working off step ladders or high ladders in general is discouraged when changing light bulbs in facilities with high ceilings. Alternatives should be explored and always ensure a minimum of two persons are involved when changing light bulbs in your facility.

8. Has an assessment been carried out on any catering/food preparation to ensure compliance with food hygiene regulations? (See Guidance Notes, Section 7.5)

Many places of worship hold events where food preparation is undertaken, sometimes only on occasion and others on a daily basis. Proper training in food handling techniques and equipment should be undertaken as prescribed by local authorities.

9. Has an assessment been carried out on manual handling operations? (See Guidance Notes, Section 7.6)

In many places of worship, there is a constant moving of chairs, staging, pianos etc. to cater to different layouts and services throughout the year. We recommend the risk of injury be reduced through adequate training and through the use of mechanical aids as required. Whenever possible, manual handling should be avoided altogether.

10. Are the grounds and yard – including sidewalks, driveways, steps, fences, walls and trees – in good repair and properly maintained? (See Guidance Notes, Sections 8 & 9)

Particular attention should be given to exterior walkways, paths and parking areas subject to frost damage. All areas should be free from potholes and large cracks which may be subject to height changes due to the freeze/thaw cycle.

Stairs should be clean, with adequate railings (firmly secured) and free from obstacles. Walls, fencing and gates must be kept in good repair, and trees should be subject to annual inspections and maintenance by qualified person(s) to prevent falling branches which could damage your building or the property of others. Where graveyards are part of the grounds, gravestones, tombs and monuments must be maintained in a safe condition. Although tombstones are the responsibility of the family, you may be responsible where family cannot be located, and you also have general liability for the safety of the grounds.

YES	NO	N/A

11. Are floor surfaces and coverings in good condition and properly maintained? (See Guidance Notes, Sections 8 and 9)

Slipping, tripping and falling are a major cause of injuries. You must ensure that there are no unexpected changes in floor levels or stair heights and that floor surfaces are not sunken, cracked or damaged. Carpet runners and mats should sit flat and preferably be secured. “Wet Floor” signs should be used and good housekeeping practices established.

12. Are all stairways (both inside and out) in good condition and well lit? (See Guidance Notes, Section 8.1.1, 8.1.2, 8.2)

Stairways must have adequate handrails securely attached and be well lit. It is good practice to affix non-slip treads and to paint the edge/ bull nose of each step to designate the height change.

Motion-sensitive lighting is recommended for all exterior areas and stairwells.

13. Does your organization have a written Health & Safety policy?

Health & Safety legislation also applies to places of worship. In Ontario, where there are 5 or more employees, a Health & Safety representative must be appointed. Where there are 20 or more employees, a Health & Safety Committee shall be formed. Requirements may vary across the country and it is recommended that you check your own provincial legislation in this regard.

It is the duty of every employee, including part-time employees such as organists, caretakers and administrators, to take reasonable care for their own safety and that of other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions. With a large majority of institutions relying on volunteers, a written Health & Safety policy is essential in ensuring a safe environment for all.

14. Have assessments been carried out on all substances hazardous to health and controls put in place where necessary?

Substances most likely found in places of worship are gasoline, pesticides, insecticides, weed killers, fertilizers and cleaning products.

All hazardous substances must be stored and used in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. Consideration should be given to replacing dangerous substances with less hazardous (Green) alternatives.

Towers may be subject to pigeon droppings which can be hazardous to health and may cause the disease psittacosis. Specialist advice should be obtained.

15. Do you have regular inspections of lifting equipment?

Many places of worship have large, heavy and ornate font covers, candelabra and sanctuary lamps which may be raised or lowered by a system of pulleys and counterweights. Winches and lifting equipment may also be found in towers for raising and lowering bells and other materials. We recommend a qualified person(s) inspect the equipment on an annual basis.

YES	NO	N/A

16. Has an assessment been carried out to ensure there is no risk of injury from glass in doors and windows?

We recommend the installation of safety glass in all windows below waist height and in doors below shoulder height and elsewhere if there exists the likelihood of injury.

Places of worship built prior to the 1970s may well have low level glass that should be upgraded.

17. Is all equipment, machinery, tools and other items in good condition and regularly maintained, checked and repaired?

Inspections should be carried out by suitably qualified person(s) on all equipment, tools and machinery whenever the equipment is likely to become unsafe due to environment, damage or wear.

Persons using the equipment should be provided with adequate instruction, information and training in the safe use of same.

Boilers and other heating equipment should be inspected at the beginning and end of the heating season.

Lawnmowers and other items used for yard and grounds maintenance must be regularly checked and serviced and personal protective equipment such as visors and gloves must be available and in good repair.

YES	NO	N/A