

**A Making it Easier Guide**  
*For Churchwardens*



***Electrical Safety***  
***in your church***



Diocese of  
Liverpool

## ***Introduction***

As a Churchwarden one of your key duties is to make sure that the fabric, fixtures and fittings in your church are kept in good working order. This guide is part of a series which aims to make it easier for you to do this.

One of the principal causes of fires in churches is the unsafe or incorrect use of electricity. This leaflet gives

- General guidance on electrical safety
- Advice about wiring
- Details on the Electrical Installation Condition Report
- Information about Portable Appliance testing

This guide is not a statement of the law but is intended to give you good general guidance. We will notify you of any significant changes to the law or regulations on the website and via our diocesan weekly email bulletin.

If you are unsure have any questions or need further advice then contact

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# Top Ten Tips

## Do

- keep proper records of all electrical testing, maintenance and repairs carried out in your church.
- check that portable appliances are safe before using them.
- make sure everyone who uses your church knows how to use electricity safely.
- carry out a proper Risk Assessment at least once a year so you remain aware of specific hazards and how to keep everyone safe.
- make sure all electrical items and appliances are turned off and disconnected when not in use.

## Do not

- allow unqualified people to carry out any work, however minor, on your church's electrical system.
- overload sockets by plugging in too many appliances.
- connect extension leads to each other.
- risk using an appliance if you are not sure it's safe. If it doesn't look safe, it probably isn't.
- store combustible materials next to or near to electrical equipment.

## ***General guidance and advice***

### ***Here are some simple checks and points to remember to keep your church safe***

Water and electricity do not mix. If your church has a water ingress problem you will need to avoid using electrical appliances in the affected area(s).

Never be tempted to replace a blown fuse with tinfoil, a paperclip or anything else. Only use the correct rated fuse for the appliance – if you haven't got one you should lock the appliance away where it can't be used until you can fit the correct fuse.

All electrical equipment generates heat. Faulty or incorrectly-used electrical equipment can generate a dangerous amount of heat - never store combustible material near electrical appliances.

Take special care at Christmas, the peak time for electrical fires. You must resist the temptation to plug in as many fairy lights and portable heaters as possible. Only plug in what your church's electrical installation can safely handle. Remember that these items are Portable Appliances which should be periodically tested for safety. (see section on Portable Appliance Testing)

By Law, you must include electrical safety in your annual Health & Safety Risk Assessment. You may copy any or all of the information contained in this leaflet into your PCC's Health & Safety Policy.

Turn off and disconnect appliances when you finish using them. This isn't just about saving energy, it is an important fire precaution.

## **Advice about wiring**

***You need to make sure the wiring in your church is safe.***

Faulty wiring is a particular problem, especially in churches which were electrified early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and which have had several "upgrades", alterations and extensions. Where original wiring is still in place you need to make sure that the rubber or plastic insulation has not deteriorated over the years to the point that it has become unsafe.

More modern churches are not immune to the risks of electrical faults either: the increase in the number of electrical appliances used can lead to overloads as more current is drawn than the system was designed to handle. Some churches may have had circuits added by well meaning but unqualified members. If this has happened in your church then it adds to the risk.

Nowadays the Faculty Jurisdiction requires that any addition to your church's electrical system to be authorised by Faculty and approved by the church's insurers before they are installed.

If you are looking to upgrade or change your system you need to make sure the person or firm who will carry out the installation can prove that they are properly qualified and competent to do so through membership of a professional trade body such as NAPIT or NICEIC.

# Electrical Installation Condition Report

***The law requires that your church has an inspection by a competent electrician every five years.***

Since 2012 this takes the form of a Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) which notes any damage, deterioration or other unsafe conditions. Any faults will be classified C1 (immediate rectification required), C2 (unacceptable condition presenting danger to users) or C3 (improvement recommended).

Any C1 faults which can't be rectified immediately will lead to the affected circuit(s) being isolated until repairs can be carried out.

The EICR does not specify how any faults identified should be rectified. Where major works are required you should seek quotations from at least three professional electricians and obtain a Faculty before starting the work.

The EICR (and its predecessor, the Periodic Inspection Report - PIR) should be kept in a safe place. Your Archdeacon may require sight of the report during the Visitation, and your Architect will want to see it as part of the Quinquennial Inspection. Fire Safety Officers carrying out routine premises inspections and representatives of your insurers in the event of a claim relating to an electrical incident may also need to see the EICR. You will need to keep full details of maintenance or repair work with this EICR.

**If your church does not have an EICR or PIR dated within the last five years, you should organise for an EICR to be produced by a professional electrician.**

## **Portable Appliance Testing (PAT testing)**

***A portable appliance is any piece of electrical equipment which can be plugged in to the mains via a socket***, such as a kettle, a portable heater or laptop. These items can deteriorate over time or suffer accidental damage, and their electrical safety may be affected as a result.

It is a legal requirement that the portable appliances in church are periodically inspected for safety by a competent person (not necessarily a professional electrician). There is no prescribed interval for this "PAT testing". Where you only use a small number of appliances you can test them every two years. If you have a large number of appliances in frequent use you may want to adopt a yearly testing programme. The register of portable appliances and test results is an important document which you must keep in a safe place and made available for inspection.

In addition to the formal "PAT test", it is wise for those using portable appliances to check them over before use. If it doesn't look safe then you should not use it.

Lock away any unsafe portable appliances until they can be repaired or disposed of. The Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations apply so you must not put appliances in the bin. Take them to a recycling facility. Keep a record of all appliances brought into or taken out of the church.

**If you have not tested your portable appliances in the last two years then you must organise a PAT test without delay.**

## **Sockets, Adaptors and Extension Leads**

You should not use a damaged electrical socket (the face plate is cracked or has scorch marks). You should not overload sockets.

You should avoid using “Block” type plug adaptors – which allow four or more plugs to be connected into a single socket – as they can overload the socket and are a fire risk.

Extension leads, when used safely and correctly, can be very useful. Coil-type extension leads must always be fully uncoiled before use otherwise they can become dangerously hot. Avoid this type of lead unless you need one longer than about five metres. Never connect two extension leads together.

If you use an extension lead or adapter which is fitted with an RCD (a cut-out to prevent overloading), you should always use the test button to verify that it is working. Never bypass the RCD.

Never connect a portable heater to an extension lead. If you use portable electric heaters plug them directly into the mains socket and only use electric heaters with a thermostatic cut-out fitted.

You should never run an extension lead through a window, doorway, or under a carpet. This can result in cable damage.

Extension leads are a trip hazard. You should avoid their use if possible. Keep them away from busy areas and mark them clearly with “Tiger Tape” or plastic cones. If you use a lead in a service or event then have someone to direct people away from it.

**Walk around your church, looking for any inappropriate use of adaptors or extension leads. Disconnect and remove them.**