



Project Report The Promotion of Safety in Churches September 2012

Summary

In response to safety concerns about churches in Brighton and Hove City Council, targeted visits were carried out in Chichester District. Safety issues in churches were highlighted around asbestos surveys, working at height and trip hazards. Safety workshops and website information were formulated as project outcomes and were refined by the church visits.

Introduction

The project aims were formulated as a result of the fatality of an elderly church volunteer in Brighton. This accident resulted in the Brighton and Hove Council Church Safety project designed to assess safety provision in churches. In addition, an Ecclesiastical Insurance report cited the main health and safety concerns in churches as being asbestos in organs, electrical safety, changing light bulbs, unstable grave stones and access to towers.

Method

6 churches were selected from the 130 plus churches within the Chichester District Council boundary. Premise selection was based primarily on building age (i.e. pre Victorian) and structure (i.e. tall bell tower or spire) as these buildings were deemed more likely to have issues around working at height, slips, trips and falls, asbestos etc. The visits included physical inspection of the premises followed by written and verbal advice to the vicar and church volunteers to promote safer working practices.

The information gained from the visits was used to produce a partnership approach to church safety workshops between Chichester District Council, Ecclesiastical Insurance and the Archdeacons for Chichester Diocese in a Diocesan-wide initiative (covering East and West Sussex). Training has been scheduled for Summer 2013 with corresponding church safety advice being uploaded on the Council's website.

Findings and observations

- All the churches visited had a proper grasp of health and safety issues in their church.
- The churches relied on professional quinquennial inspection from Ecclesiastical Insurance for advice and guidance
- Churches also relied heavily on volunteers (primarily churchwardens) to carry out health and safety duties in the church – all were retired and some had health and safety expertise from previous employment
- The primary safety issues encountered in the inspections were
 - Working at height
 - Slips, trips and falls (outside)
 - Asbestos survey on site

References

Church Health and Safety” And “Model health and safety policy” Ecclesiastical Insurance
<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/churchmatters/churchguidance/churchhealthandsafety/index.aspx>

HSE Church accident reports: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/press/2012/rnn-ldn-7612.htm>