

Church Buildings

Advice Note for Deacons' Court and Finance Committees

This note carries advice or recommendations. The document is subject to change as we respond to the spread of COVID-19.

Version History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
V.1	01/04/2020	First version of document
V.2	05/05/2020	Information added – Mitigating the risks of Legionella

Church Buildings

In light of government stay at home advice and the suspension of worship services in church buildings, Deacons' Courts and Finance Committees should consider the safety and security of unoccupied church buildings.

Ecclesiastical Insurance provide cover for many Free Church of Scotland church buildings and have introduced temporary cover enhancements to insurance policies, including to cover buildings temporarily closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Please check with your insurer if they have any advice or conditions related to the temporary closure of Church buildings during this period.

Ecclesiastical have set a number of conditions in relation to temporary increase in cover and we believe **these conditions are useful for all congregations to consider.**

Extract from Ecclesiastical Insurance¹

It is a *condition precedent to liability* that in respect of **Temporarily Closed** premises:

(1) where there will be no need to re-enter the premises during the period of temporary closure you must turn off electricity gas and water supplies at the mains (and where reasonable to do so drain down water systems) other than those services required to maintain:

- critical business infrastructure required to allow the continuance of the organisations operations and support temporary home working arrangements
- intruder alarms
- fire alarms
- sprinkler installations
- other fire suppression security or other risk protection systems or devices

(2) you must maintain in full and efficient working order and keep operational all:

- alarms
- sprinkler installations
- fire suppression systems
- locks and all other protective and security devices including gates and other perimeter security protection at the *premises*.

(3) where water systems have not been drained down and/or where there is a sprinkler installation *you* must maintain the central heating system to prevent freezing and

- i. the sprinkler system should be inspected to ensure it is operating correctly whenever such buildings are inspected
- ii. the temperature throughout the building must be maintained at not less than 7 degrees Centigrade (45 degrees Fahrenheit)
- iii. where annual servicing and maintenance is due the sprinkler system must be serviced and maintained as soon as circumstance permit by an appropriately qualified engineer.

(4) *you* must

- i. remove all internal waste and
- ii. position all external bins as at least 5 metres from the buildings (or otherwise as far as possible where this is not possible) and secure the bins in position where this is possible

(5) Provided any travel required to carry out an inspection is in line with the latest government advice *you* must undertake an internal and external inspection of such buildings at least every 7 days and

- i. rectify as soon as is reasonably possible any defects in the fabric of the building or any protective or security devices or installations
- ii. maintain a record of inspections including the remedy of any defects
- iii. remove accumulations of post from the letterbox during each inspection and take any other action to ensure the premises cannot be easily identified as unused or closed down

Where government travel advice does not allow the necessary travel to complete an inspection the need for an inspection is deferred until travel restrictions are lifted to a level that allows inspections to re-commence

6) *you* must put in place contingency plans in case the primary person(s) carrying out weekly inspections or responding to alarm activations need to self isolate or are ill so that weekly inspections and alarm activation responses can be maintained by another appointed person

(7) *you* must tell *us* as soon as *you* become aware of any illegal entry to the *premises* whether or not any *damage* has occurred

(8) *you* must review and update your risk assessment (including the fire risk assessment) of such buildings to reflect the temporary change in risk

¹Source: Ecclesiastical Insurance <https://www.ecclesiastical.com/latest-news/coronavirus-temporary-cover-enhancements/>

We would advise that where possible periodic visits/inspections of buildings should be undertaken by one designated person (to reduce risk of transmission) and not be undertaken by those who are part of higher risk groups e.g. aged over 70 or with underlying health conditions.

You may also want to consider if there are any members who may pass by the building as part of their daily exercise and could visibly check the external of the building on a regular basis too.

Mitigating the risks of Legionella

Legionella is a group of bacteria which can cause Legionnaires' disease which, although rare, is serious and potentially fatal. It is usually caught in buildings where the bacteria have got into the water supply.

There is an increased risk of legionella occurring in Church buildings which have had to be closed due to Covid-19, as hot and cold-water systems will not be running, thus increasing the chances of bacteria forming. It is therefore important that water is not allowed to stagnate within water systems, and so there should be careful management of Churches (and Manses) that are vacant for extended periods.

In order to reduce the risk of legionella occurring, the following steps should be taken:

- As a general principle, outlets on hot and cold-water systems should be used at least once a week to maintain a degree of water flow and minimise the chances of stagnation.
- Buildings should be checked at least once a week, and all hot and cold taps run for 5 minutes, and all toilets flushed.
- Consideration should be given to draining the water system in buildings which are to be vacant for long periods.
- Empty Manses should also be checked once a week, and in addition to running taps and flushing toilets, showers should be run for at least 5 minutes. Alternatively, shower heads should be removed. Electric showers pose less of a risk, as these are generally cold-water-fed and heat only small volumes of water during operation.

It is also recommended that before bringing buildings back into use, water systems are recommissioned to ensure that they are in fact free from legionella, and that plans for this be put in place now. For most Church buildings this will simply involve flushing through with fresh mains water, with taps fully open. More detailed information on recommissioning can be provided on request.