

Safer places of Worship

Means of Escape

People should be able to safely leave a building by moving away from a fire to a place of safety.

The premises, be they a church, room or hall, should be provided with sufficient exits to allow escape for the whole congregation. When assessing the means of escape you should take account of the loss of exits or routes as a result of any fire.



All exit routes must be free of any obstruction and floors or floor coverings should be in a good condition. It is important to ensure exit routes are adequately lit especially where there is a change in floor level.

Wherever possible, exit doors should open outwards and display an exit sign. These requirements may be relaxed provided that:

- Those supervising the activity and others assisting them are trained in the action to be taken in case of fire and the evacuation procedure for the building, and
- the building is one storey, and
- the available exits are of sufficient width to accommodate the number of people who may be present within the required evacuation time, and
- the exit doors lead directly to the open air enabling people to leave the building and grounds.

When the buildings are occupied all doors from the area in use must be capable of being opened, without the use of a key. They should preferably be fitted with a "push bar" type of fastening unless the numbers of people required to use them is less than 50, in which case a single, simple fastening that can be opened without a key e.g. a "Yale" type lock may be acceptable.

Exit routes should be clearly marked to enable people unfamiliar with the premises to locate exits in the event of a fire.

In a single stairway building, it is necessary to ensure that a fire on the lower floor(s) does not prevent people escaping from an upper floor. This can be achieved by the provision of an additional stairway, totally independent of the first stairway, or by ensuring that the existing stairway is enclosed by materials which have a fire resistance of at least 30 minutes. All doors opening onto the stairway must be fire doors rated at least 30 minutes and fitted with a self-closing device.

Powered stair-lifts should not be installed without advice from the Fire Brigade as they may significantly reduce the width of stairs when in use.

EVACUATION DRILLS

One of the best ways of confirming the effectiveness of the training given and the operation of the emergency plan is to carry out fire drills.

It would be prudent to hold these periodically, preferably at least twice a year, without prior notice.

One way of implementing this would be to have a drill immediately following the main service of the day, when the building is likely to be most populated.