



DAC Guidance

Electrical wiring in churches

Despite increasingly high standards of installation, numerous church fires can be attributed to faulty electric wiring or apparatus. It is therefore important that electricity should be treated with respect.

General

All new electric wiring should be installed in accordance with the Regulations for Electrical Installations issued by the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE), Current Edition, under British Standard BS7671.

Electrical contractors enrolled with the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC), the Electrical Contractors Association (ECA) or the National Association of Professional Inspectors and Testers (NAPIT) should be employed for work in churches.

The NICEIC carries out periodical and random inspections of contractors' work; should any remedial work be required to repair faulty work, then this is carried out at the contractor's expense. The Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) operate a guarantee scheme for the work of their members – work done which does not comply with the safety requirements of the Wiring Regulations will be rectified, at the member's expense.

Inspection and Testing

Churches should have their electrical installations inspected and tested every five years in accordance with the recommendations of the Church Buildings Council. The inspection and testing should be carried out in accordance with IEE Regulations, Guidance Note No. 3, and an inspection certificate obtained in every case. The certificate should be kept with the church records.

The switchgear in the church should be labelled to show:

1. the date of the most recent inspection, and
2. the date of the recommended future inspection.

The Church Authorities should ensure that a thorough physical examination of all portable appliances is conducted regularly to ensure that worn flexes, broken plugs or sockets etc. are replaced immediately.

The Health and Safety Executive publication Maintaining portable electrical equipment in offices and other low-risk environments, Ref. INDG236 11/97 C1250, gives guidance on how and when inspections should be carried out.

Temporary Wiring

Temporary or extension wiring should only be allowed in exceptional circumstances and in any event for a maximum period of six months. All temporary circuits should be physically disconnected from the mains when not in use (even where the mains switches are turned off).

Temporary wiring should always be installed in accordance with the IEE Regulations for Electrical Installations (BS 7671) and be protected against mechanical damage by means of armoured cable or conduit.

Permanently wired socket outlets should be installed as near to the location of lecterns, cribs or Christmas trees etc., as possible.

Mains Circuits

Wiring should be arranged so that as many circuits as possible can be isolated at the mains switches when the church is not in use.

Mechanical Damage

Any evidence of damage to wiring, plugs, sockets or other fittings should be attended to immediately upon discovery. Any wiring installations should take into account the possibility of mechanical damage and be protected accordingly. Trailing cables are a health and safety hazard. Where essential, they should be kept to the absolute minimum length and should never be hidden under carpets as the risk of mechanical damage from sharp heels etc. is considerable.

Electricity at Work Regulations 1989

The Electricity at Work Regulations have wide application and apply to most churches. They require that electrical installations are safe and regularly checked by a qualified electrician working to the current IEE regulations (BS7671). In no circumstances should an untrained person attempt any electrical work. The Health and Safety Executive guidance notes indicate that even the changing of a light bulb or replacing a fuse should be left to trained individuals.

Part P, Building Regulations – Electrical Safety

Does Part P of the Building Regulations have any implications for churches?

In short the answer is no – however there may be some confusion arising from the

introduction of a new category of Competent Person. The following notes are to clarify which contractors are suitably qualified to carry out work in churches.

From 1st January 2005 any electrical installation work which is carried out in dwellings has been subject to Part P of the Building Regulations. An implication of Part P is that from January 2005 work carried out within dwellings should be notified to a Building

Control Body unless the proposed work is to be undertaken by a Competent Person.

A 'Competent Person' is a firm that has been approved by one of the government-approved Part P schemes as sufficiently competent to self-certify that its work complies with the Building Regulations. Schemes authorised by the Department for Communities and Local Government are listed on its website (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/>).

Where electrical work is carried out on churches, it is standard practice that contractors should be enrolled with the NICEIC, the ECA or the NAPIT. A condition to that effect is often added to the faculty authorising the work. It is important therefore to draw a distinction between those contractors who simply enjoy 'competent person' status within the context of Part P and those who are fully enrolled with the NICEIC, ECA or NAPIT.

The Council therefore advises that contractors who are registered with a Competent Person scheme as domestic installers only but not also enrolled with the NICEIC, ECA or NAPIT as competent to undertake the full scope of work on non-domestic premises should not be employed to carry out work within churches.

This guidance note is based on one issued by Ecclesiastical Insurance Group.

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