



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

**Disaster Management Plans**  
**Guidance for Churches**

**Church Buildings Council**  
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# Disaster Management Plans - Guidance for Churches

## Introduction

All Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) and others responsible for church buildings should consider the compilation of a concise and practical **Disaster Management Plan (DMP)**, which will help them to:

- Assess and address the likely nature and triggers of disasters (through a **Risk Assessment**)
- Set out procedures for evacuation and safety, and prioritise fabric and contents protection (in an **Emergency Plan**)
- Set out procedures for salvage, storage, business continuity, repair, and post-disaster restoration and review (in a **Recovery Plan**).

Pilots have been undertaken on two churches in the Diocese of Durham, Jarrow St Paul and Monkwearmouth St Peter. The DMPs can be accessed here: ([Churchcare link](#)). Please note these were prepared for an UNESCO World Heritage Site application, and therefore are very comprehensive. Make yours fit for purpose.

## The Issue

All heritage assets are exposed to losses from disasters such as fire, lightning (which may spark a fire), explosions, storms and flood. Damage can also occur through neglect or inappropriate conditions, activities or measures.

As visually prominent public buildings containing works of art and valuable materials which are often empty, churches are vulnerable to damage through wilful destruction or theft. Metal theft is a current issue which has the potential to cause a disaster.

Historic churches and their contents are particularly vulnerable to fire damage because of the extensive use of timber in their structure as well as internal fixtures and fittings.

Flood risk is also an increasingly serious issue. Increased flooding from storm events or fluvial and sea flooding and coastal erosion, which might affect coastal and low-lying churches is being noted, likely being exacerbated by Climate Change.

## Mitigation – the Disaster Management Plan

To mitigate these risks, PCCs should work to ensure the protection of the buildings in their care, including interior fixtures and fittings integral to the design and function of the building. These measures will be brought together in the **Disaster Management Plan**, which will consist of the following sections.

PCCs should undertake **Risk Assessments** to best current practice. These will include provision for staff and contractors to receive appropriate and adequate induction and on-going training to minimise risk.

The operation of a practical **Emergency Plan** (sometimes known as a Crisis Plan) and close co-ordination and co-operation with the Police, Fire Brigade and other agencies will help ensure that in the event of a disaster they are prepared and can respond in the most effective ways. This will include appropriate measures for dealing with the media.

For the scenario that such an event occurs, the PCC will produce a **Recovery Plan**, which is an essential but often overlooked prerequisite of successful disaster mitigation. This will ensure that critical activities can continue, and establish priorities for repair and salvage.

### **Preparation and Review**

The Quinquennial Inspection report and the Inventory are critical documents for the preparation of a DMP, and should always be up to date. The PCC may be able to produce the DMP itself in collaboration with their architect, the DAC and their insurer. However, in the case of very large and complex churches the PCC may need to consider acquiring professional help.

The PCC should consult widely in the preparation of the DMP, including English Heritage and the local authority, the Police and Fire Brigade, the insurers, the local NHS Trusts, and specialists in the survey and repair of disaster-affected historic buildings.

The Fire Brigade can be asked to provide a Fire Risk Assessment for the church. This is your opportunity to point out areas of interest and vulnerability, for example zones of the building which might be protected, or where the use of water and chemicals might not be appropriate, if there was a choice.

Other sources of advice include the National Trust and Historic Royal Palaces, who have experience of the consequences of many sorts of disasters. There may be regional and local Resilience Forums (see References at the end of this document), and contact should be made with these.

The DMP should be reviewed cyclically, preferably with the Quinquennial Inspection Reviews, and certainly following disasters at the church or other comparable sites. Copies should be kept by the incumbent, the Churchwardens, the Diocese, the Police and the Fire Brigade.

### **Practical guidance and relevant legislation**

Incumbents and Parochial Church Councils are responsible for the safety of persons while in a church or churchyard. Where a PCC has employees, duties are also likely to arise under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974). PCCs could in some circumstances be held liable for injuries to visitors (including trespassers) under the Occupiers' Liability Act (1984).

The Churchcare and Ecclesiastical Insurance (<http://www.ecclesiastical.com/>) web sites contain details of this and other useful information. In addition to this, the following general points and tips should be borne in mind.

- Ensure that your church building and its contents are realistically and adequately insured.
- Your insurers must be notified and consulted at the earliest opportunity if a disaster occurs; they will have expert advice and support.
- Detection and alarm systems and fire and flood protection systems need to be kept serviced and up to date, or consideration given to installing them if they do not exist. Your insurer and DAC will be able to advise you.
- In the event of a disaster, you will be in the hands of (well-meaning) people who will be pressurising you to make decisions. Unless there is an immediate Health & Safety risk, STOP and wait for considered professional advice. Significant and costly damage can be caused by hasty decisions in the small hours of the night.
- Make sure that it is clear that one person provides a single point of contact with the media, and that this is agreed with your Diocesan Communications Officer, who will also be informed as soon as possible in the event of a disaster.
- Early protection is invaluable. Knowing sympathetic local builders who can cover a roof swiftly can prevent costly damage. Make sure you have their details to hand in your DMP.
- Once the immediate emergency is passed – take control of events! Do not let them control you. If your DMP is solid and up to date, this will be much easier.

# **The Disaster Management Plan – Structure and Contents**

The Disaster Management Plan is a wrapper, which will contain three separate but inter-related documents, following an introduction to set the context.

## **Introduction and Context**

Discuss briefly the circumstances – why the DMP has been compiled, and by whom. List any previous and present issues affecting the site, including general areas of vulnerability (macro-risks). These might include flood risk, nearby industrial installation, long-standing subsidence, etc.

## **Part 1: Risk Assessment – components**

1. Name of church
2. Date of completion and updates of the assessment.
3. Identify specific risks and severity of risk (low, medium or high). You can present this in tabular form (see Appendix 1). See also Ecclesiastical's advice on this: <http://www.ecclesiastical.com/Images/ME079%20Risk%20Assessment%20Notes.pdf>
4. Describe action and measures in existence or being taken to minimise the identified risk.
5. Future action which should be undertaken arising from above, including training.

## **Part 2: Emergency Plan – components**

1. Name of church.
2. Date of completion or update of the plan.
3. Staff to be called in the event of an emergency (the Emergency Reaction Team):

Name:                      Position:                      Contact details

The members of the Team should be arranged in a Cascade system, which should be regularly tested. If it does not work, it must be revised. Each member of the team must be aware of their responsibilities in terms of contacting other members, their own role, and where to convene in the event of a disaster to co-ordinate the response.

*This information can usefully be summarised onto a crib sheet, which can be folded to wallet size and should be carried by all members of the Emergency Reaction Team at all times (see Appendix 2).*

It should also clarify who is the person that provides the single point of contact with the media, who would liaise with the Diocesan Communications Officer. Some major

churches may wish to have a formal policy for dealing with the media, which should be followed.

4. Response procedure – what to do in the event of an emergency, in other words procedure for evacuation, safety and where possible protection of assets.
5. Locations of immediately available emergency equipment and supplies (attach map or floor plan with locations marked)
6. List of people and organisations which have copies of this information

### **Part 3: Recovery Plan - components**

1. Name of church
2. Date of completion or update of the plan
3. Staff to be called in the aftermath of a disaster (Disaster Recovery Team – this may or may not be the same people as the Emergency Reaction Team)

Name:                      Position:                      Contact details:

4. Salvage Priority List:

Attach a copy of the Inventory identifying all vital/essential records and objects. The location and record medium of these and other copies and documents should be noted.

The following questions can be helpful in determining priorities:

- Can the items or records be replaced? At what cost?
- Would the cost of replacement be less or more than restoration of the items or records?
- How important are they to the church?
- Are the records duplicated elsewhere?

To simplify this process, priorities may be assigned as follows, marked on the inventory and a plan:

- Priority A. Salvage at all costs.
- Priority B. Salvage if time and resources permit.
- Priority C. Dispose of as part of general cleanup.

5. Disaster Recovery Procedures:

Attach a list of specific procedures to be followed in the aftermath of a disaster in your church, including responsibilities of particular individuals. Describe how critical activities could be resumed, how soon, and where if not at the church.

Describe where any artefacts, records etc could be stored while the building is unusable, in what conditions, and for how long.

#### 6. Follow-up Assessment:

A written report, including photographs, should be prepared after recovery and attached to a copy of the (revised if necessary) Disaster Management Plan. The report should note the effectiveness of the Plan, and should include an evaluation of the sources of supplies and equipment, and of any off-site facilities used.

### **Reference material**

There is a mass of published information – see these useful web sites. Add any documents relevant to your church.

Latest Quinquennial Inspection Report

Annotated copy of inventory

Churchcare web site, [www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk)

Ecclesiastical Insurance Group web site, [www.Ecclesiastical.com](http://www.Ecclesiastical.com)

English Heritage web site – see particularly advice on flood mitigation:  
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/advice-by-topic/climate-change/>

In regard to fire, see the following link to the UK's Fire Protection Association's guide *Heritage under Fire*  
[http://heritagefire.net/heritage\\_fire\\_wg\\_papers/wg1/app03.pdf](http://heritagefire.net/heritage_fire_wg_papers/wg1/app03.pdf)

In regard to terrorist attack, see the following link:  
[http://nactso-dev.co.uk/system/cms/files/147/files/original/Places\\_Of\\_Worship\\_2011.pdf](http://nactso-dev.co.uk/system/cms/files/147/files/original/Places_Of_Worship_2011.pdf)

UK government advice and regional and local resilience structures:  
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience.aspx>

UNESCO guidance on disaster management, to be found at:  
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/disaster-risk-reduction>

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Occupiers' Liability Act (1984)