

FIRE PREVENTION

The most common causes of fire to church properties are from electrical systems, lightning, candles, arson and heating equipment. While fires are not the most frequent losses our properties suffer, they can be the most devastating. There are nationally recognized standards for the prevention of fire losses. The National Fire Protection Association Codes (NFPA) are the most widely used fire prevention codes in the United States. Most of the following guidelines for fire prevention come from these standards.

- Poor housekeeping is one of the most common problems found, but it is also one of the easiest to correct. All storage rooms, classrooms, and offices should be checked at least weekly to ensure they are not cluttered with materials and that all storage items are organized, and whenever possible, placed on shelves or in cabinets.
- Boiler/furnace rooms should not be used as storage rooms. Material should not be stored within 6 feet of a boiler or within 3 feet of a furnace. It is not acceptable to store paint, flammable liquid, gasoline, or gasoline-powered equipment in boiler/furnace rooms. Gas-fueled water heaters must also have at least 3 feet of clearance around them at all times. Regular maintenance and servicing should be completed on all heating equipment.
- Frequently, electrical panels are located in storage rooms. Ensure that storage materials are not allowed within 3 feet of the electrical panels, as these panels are potential ignition sources for fires. Also, in case of emergency, you must have quick and easy access to the electrical panels in the event a circuit would need to be turned off. For this reason, all circuits should be labeled and a clear pathway to each panel should be maintained.
- If a building is over 20 years old, a qualified electrician should conduct a thorough electrical inspection. Many fires caused by an electrical system failure could have been prevented with regular inspection and maintenance. Over time, wiring connections loosen and something as minor as a loose receptacle connection can cause arcing and a fire. Connections behind electrical panels and switches need to be periodically tightened to eliminate fire potential.
- If a facility has a lightning protection system in place, it needs to be inspected at least every 3 years to ensure connections are secure and grounding rods meet proper grounding requirements.
- Fire extinguishers should be placed throughout the facility so there is no more than 75 feet of travel distance from any one point to an extinguisher. These extinguishers are required to be a minimum of 5 pound, ABC-rated, dry chemical fire extinguishers. Kitchens should be equipped with a minimum 5 pound, BC-rated, dry chemical unit.
- All candles should be in a double-insulated container or secured by a noncombustible base. Only parish purchased candles are allowed to be lit in the church. Candles should not be lit on holiday greenery (i.e. Christmas trees, wreaths). Candles should not be burned in offices, schools or parish halls.

- Having good security measures in place is very important in reducing the potential of an arson fire. The facility should be provided with good security lighting and all hidden areas next to buildings should be eliminated. Security lights should be set to a timer or photocell.
- Window and door locks should be secure and latch properly. Security bars and screens may be appropriate in certain areas; however, they should only be used where they do not conflict with exit requirements and Life Safety Codes.
- When locking up your facility in the evening, take a few extra minutes to conduct a safety inspection. The inspection should determine that all applicable doors and storage cabinets are locked; all appliances are unplugged or turned off; candles are extinguished; and ashtrays are safely emptied.