



# HOW TO CONDUCT A CHURCH FIRE DRILL

A guide to plan, conduct, and  
evaluate a fire drill at your church



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# BEFORE THE DRILL

## Why Should We Conduct Fire Drills?

We conduct fire drills to ensure the safety of our congregations. Holding regular fire drills helps familiarize occupants with the sound of the alarm system and allows your church to practice evacuation procedures, so in the event of a real fire, you have rehearsed the procedures and are aware of what to do.

Fire drill requirements are regulated by local state or county government organizations. A building's occupancy determines the frequency of fire drills conducted. Churches are referred to as "Assembly Occupancies," which includes buildings such as gymnasiums, theaters, churches, community halls etc. that are required to hold annual fire drills.

If you have never conducted a fire drill, don't expect everything to go perfectly the first time. The more you plan ahead of time, the better things will go.

### Here's your planning checklist:

- Review your written Emergency Plan.
- Discuss your plans and receive approval for the drill with your pastor, church board and safety committee.
- Create a crisis response team. This team might include several people with law enforcement, military or medical training. Designate duties for your crisis team members which include:
  - ▶ Directing congregants to an emergency assembly area or areas, outside and at least 150 feet away from the building. This

area should be in a location that will not interfere with arriving emergency vehicles/personnel.

- ▶ Assisting congregants with limited mobility and children in evacuating. Remember guests may be present who don't know the emergency procedure.
- ▶ Help control the flow of traffic in and out of the parking lot. People shouldn't be trying to leave when the fire department arrives. This will slow down the response time to care for the emergency.
- ▶ Conducting a search of the building to be sure all have evacuated.
- Check your alarm system several days before you conduct your drill to make sure you know how to sound the alarm and how to reset it.
- If you have a monitored alarm system, be sure to inform the monitoring agency several hours ahead of the drill. They need to be alerted, so that they do not call the fire department. Call them again, immediately after the drill has been completed, and notify them that the drill is complete and the alarm has been reset.
- Designate one of your church leaders to meet with first responders and review their strategy for responding to a fire in your building. You can also give them the date you choose to conduct the drill.
- Assign individuals to observe the drill and report back any problems they noted.



# CONDUCTING THE DRILL

*Announce to the congregation a week or two before the drill of your intent to conduct a fire drill. Tell them when the drill will take place, and what is expected of them. This is especially important if this will be the first drill. Unannounced drills should only be performed once the congregation is comfortable with what to do when the fire alarm sounds.*

## EDUCATE YOUR CONGREGATION

- 1.** Remind the alarm monitoring company or fire department of your drill.
- 2.** Sound the alarm.
- 3.** Have a designated person from your crisis response team walk to the front and announce to the congregation that a fire drill is now in progress and share the following:  
*We request that everyone take part in this Fire Drill and follow emergency evacuation procedures. Your participation and cooperation will help ensure that our plan is safe and workable and that everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency. Please remain calm and make space for those in wheelchairs and anyone needing special assistance as we all evacuate to our church's designated area.*
- 4.** Start your timer to evaluate how long it takes to clear the building.
- 5.** Have members of your crisis response team direct congregants to the appropriate exits and watch and assist those needing assistance.
- 6.** Have a designated member of your crisis response team sweep the building to be sure all have evacuated.
- 7.** Wait until everyone is out of the building and gathered in the designated area. Stop the timer. The first drill will take longer because it is new to everyone. As you practice and conduct more drills, evacuation time will decrease.
- 8.** Reset the alarm.
- 9.** Call the alarm monitoring company or fire department and let them know that the drill has been concluded and the alarm is reset.
- 10.** Allow the congregation to re-enter the building.



# AFTER THE DRILL



- Ask for feedback from the congregation and those who assisted with the drill.
- Identify problems and weaknesses.
- Make notes of what went well and what didn't. Your record should include:
  - ▶ *The date and time of the drill.*
  - ▶ *The name of the person who conducted the drill.*
  - ▶ *The elapsed time required to vacate the facility.*
  - ▶ *Notes and observations regarding problems with the drill or areas of needed improvement.*

Maintaining records and other notes will provide you with the benefit of information gleaned from past events.

- After reviewing all notes, revise your emergency response plan as needed. Don't forget to set the date of your next drill!

When you begin to have drills, it is best to schedule additional drills three or four drills in the first year. After the congregation is comfortable with the procedure, yearly drills are sufficient. Remember to vary the time of the drills. Schedule them before, during, and after Sabbath School, the announcement period, and during the worship service. You might plan one for a midweek service at night. Emergency situations can happen at any time, so be prepared.

## ARM CARES

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