



Fire Precautions for Parsonages

Fire can have a devastating effect on a building and its contents and can spread rapidly owing to the amount of dry combustible material contained in the average house. Life is threatened by both burns and asphyxiation and fire brigades are called out to over 60,000 fires in domestic premises every year. These domestic fires kill nearly 500 people and injure over 11,000 annually.

This leaflet offers some basic advice on how to prevent a fire and how to protect members of the household from its effects should one occur. It builds on the recommendations contained in the revised Parsonages Design Guide ('The Green Guide') which offers guidance to dioceses and others on the design and building of new parsonages and is based on the advice of the London Fire Brigade and the Home Office.

1. Smoke Alarms

Many of the deaths and injuries from fires in the home could be prevented if people had early warning and were able to get out in time. Fitting smoke alarms can save lives since they will alert the occupants of a house to the presence of a fire earlier than the human senses can (especially at night), giving an opportunity to escape.

1.1 What is a smoke alarm?

Smoke alarms are self-contained devices that incorporate a means of detecting a fire (smoke detector) and giving a warning (alarm). They are about the size of a hand and are normally fitted to the ceiling. They detect fires in their earliest stages and sound a loud warning alarm giving those precious few minutes in which to get out of the house safely. The noise emitted is penetrating and closing doors at night is unlikely to render the equipment ineffective.

1.2 What types of smoke alarm are there?

There are two types of smoke alarm currently available on the market - **ionisation** and **optical (also described as photoelectric or photoelectronic)**. The ionisation type is cheapest. They are very sensitive to small particles of smoke produced by flaming fires, such as chip pans, and will detect this type of fire before the smoke gets too thick. They are marginally less sensitive to slow-burning and smouldering fires which give off large quantities of smoke before flaming occurs. The optical type are more expensive but more effective at detecting larger particles of smoke produced by slow-burning fires, such as smouldering foam-filled upholstery and

overheated PVC wiring. They are marginally less sensitive to free burning flaming fires.

Each type looks similar and they are powered either by a battery or mains electricity (or a combination of both). Some are interconnectable, so that any smoke detected at one point can raise the alarm at all the others. Some have additional features, such as emergency lights and silence buttons, for use where false alarms can be a nuisance, e.g. when cooking.

1.3 What type of smoke alarm is recommended?

Both types of fire are common so the best form of protection would be to choose at least one smoke alarm of each type. Ideally, and to ensure continuity of supply, mains powered alarms with a back-up power supply (e.g. battery, rechargeable capacitor) are the best option. They should be interconnected. As an added safety measure, it is best that alarms contain a battery powered emergency light to help guide the occupants of the house to safety in the event of the main electricity being cut out (which is quite possible in the case of an electrical fire). However, simple battery powered alarms of either type will give good minimum protection.

All smoke alarms must conform to the appropriate British/European Standards. In addition, mains powered alarms with battery back-up should be installed in accordance with the relevant Standards. The local Fire Brigade's Safety Officer will be able to provide details of the Standards currently applicable. Local Authority Building Control requires all new residential accommodation to be fitted with smoke alarms and the system required will depend upon the size, type and proposed use of the accommodation. Whenever an older property is to be structurally altered and refurbished, the local Fire Brigade's Safety Officer should be consulted over the most appropriate system to install. No charge is made for any advice given.

1.4 How many smoke alarms should be fitted?

Fires can start anywhere, so the more that are fitted, the higher the level of protection.

For **maximum** protection an alarm should be fitted in every room, except the bathroom, kitchen or dining room with a door directly into the kitchen. In these locations, steam or cooking fumes may trigger the alarm unnecessarily. Similarly, an alarm should not be fitted in the garage where exhaust fumes are likely to set it off. Cigarette smoke will not normally trigger an alarm.

For **minimum** protection the number to be fitted will depend on the design of the accommodation. If the accommodation is on one floor, one smoke alarm, preferably of the optical type, may be enough to provide early warning of a fire. If the home has more than one floor (most modern parsonage houses consist of two storeys), at least one alarm should be fitted on each level. In this case a combination of optical and ionisation alarms, preferably interconnected, will give the best protection.

1.5 Where should smoke alarms be fitted?

For homes with more than one floor, for minimum protection one alarm should be fitted **at the bottom of the staircase** well away from the kitchen with further alarms fitted **on each upstairs landing**. If (unusually for a parsonage) the accommodation is on one level, for minimum protection, the alarm should be fitted **in the hallway** between the living and sleeping areas but well away from the kitchen.

Smoke alarms should normally be fitted at least 30 centimetres (12 inches) away from any wall or light fitting and as close to the centre of the room, hallway or landing ceiling as possible. They should never be fitted within 15 centimetres (6 inches) of the corner between the ceiling and wall as this is dead air space in which the air circulation is poor and the particles can bypass the sensor. This might prevent smoke from reaching the alarm in time to provide early warning.

Important: The manufacturer's instructions should be followed at all times, particularly where mains powered alarms are to be installed.

1.6 What about the kitchen?

A mains powered **heat** detector (as opposed to a **smoke** detector) should be fitted in the kitchen (or in any dining room with a door directly into the kitchen). Ideally the heat detector should be interconnected with the smoke alarms and contain a battery back-up facility. Heat detectors are designed to sound an alarm in response to a fast rise in temperature rather than to fumes or steam produced by cooking and are therefore best in these locations. An alternative but a less convenient option may be to provide a smoke detector fitted with a mute facility (this will silence the alarm momentarily by pressing a button).

1.7 Do smoke alarms need to be maintained?

Yes, but they generally need very little maintenance. The manufacturer's instructions should always be followed carefully. Once a month the alarm should be checked by pressing the test button or with smoke from a snuffed candle. Alternatively, the detector can be checked by using one of the testing devices currently on the market for this purpose. The unit should be vacuumed every six months (the nozzle should not be allowed to touch the unit) and the casing and slots should be wiped regularly to ensure that dust is not blocking the sensor. For mains wired alarms, the power should first be switched off. Battery powered alarms should be fitted with new batteries at least once a year. Batteries should never be removed for other purposes. When redecorating, the alarm should be removed and should on no account be painted over.

1.8 Smoke alarms for people with hearing or sight disabilities

Many people whose hearing is impaired are still able to hear a conventional smoke alarm. Interconnected alarms are particularly useful in this respect

since smoke detected in one part of the house will set off other alarms elsewhere.

For people with severe hearing disabilities who would not be able to hear a conventional smoke alarm there are special devices available which make use of a vibrating pad or flashing light instead of (or in addition to) the audible signal - the vibrating pad alarms are particularly useful for deaf-blind people.

Further information can be obtained from local voluntary organisations or Social Services Departments who may be able to offer advice on products specially designed to help people with disabilities. Advice may also be available from one or more of the organisations listed at the end of this leaflet.

2. Fire Fighting Equipment

For domestic property, fire fighting equipment for occupiers' use comprises fire extinguishers and fire blankets.

2.1 Fire extinguishers

On the whole, fire brigades are not enthusiastic about fire extinguishers for use in private homes. Untrained people reacting in some panic or distress may easily use an extinguisher incorrectly or be encouraged to stay in a building fighting a fire when they should be escaping or helping others to escape and calling the Fire Brigade.

Reasonably small and portable fire extinguishers (very large ones are not easily capable of being handled in an emergency) can be useful as a safeguard against small fires, but fires should only be tackled if they are in the very early stages and if the user feels confident in doing so.

All new fire extinguishers must conform to the appropriate British/European Standards.

Fire extinguishers should be located where they can be reached easily and quickly and where their suitability for a particular fire can be checked swiftly. The best place is on an escape route, i.e. near an outside door, or on the route from the living areas to an outside door, or close to any perceived fire risk. They should be properly fixed to the wall at a height where they can be reached, but not by young children. They should be easily seen - locating them inside cupboards or behind doors will only waste valuable time if a fire breaks out. **They must not be placed over cookers or heaters or in places of extreme heat.**

The manufacturer's instructions will give advice on what needs to be done to keep a fire extinguisher in good working order. After an extinguisher has been used, even if only partially, it **must** be recharged according to the manufacturer's instructions and all fire extinguishers should be properly serviced once a year.

2.2 Different types of fire extinguisher

Fire extinguishers come in a range of sizes and are available charged with a number of different substances. However, certain substances can only deal with certain fires and inappropriate combinations of fire and extinguisher can make matters worse. All new portable fire extinguishers are now coloured red with a zone of colour indicating the contents of the extinguisher. This colour indication appears on the front of the extinguisher above the operating instructions and will be clearly visible if it is correctly mounted. However, existing fire extinguishers on which the entire body is colour coded remain useable until such time as they need to be replaced.

The following types of extinguisher deal with the fires described:

Type	Zone Colour Code	Use	Danger
Water	Red	Intended for wood, cloth, paper, plastics, coal etc. Fires involving solids. Works mainly by cooling burning material.	Do not use on chip or fat pan fires, burning oil or on electrical appliances.
AFF (Aqueous film-forming foam) – Multi-purpose	Cream	Intended for wood, cloth, paper, plastics, coal etc. Fires involving solids. Liquids such as grease, oils, paint, petrol etc. Forms a fire extinguishing film on the surface of a burning liquid. Has a cooling action with a wider extinguishing application than water on solid combustible materials.	Do not use on chip or fat pan fires.
Carbon Dioxide - CO ₂	Black	Intended for liquids such as grease, oil, paint, petrol etc. Clean, effective and safe on live electrical equipment. CO ₂ is a vaporising liquid gas which smothers the flames by displacing oxygen in the air.	

N.B. The following types of fire extinguisher are generally recommended for use outside the home:

- **Standard Dry Powder or Multi-Purpose Dry Powder**

STANDARD DRY POWDER knocks down flames on liquids such as grease (except chip or fat pan fires), oil, paint and petrol.

MULTI-PURPOSE DRY POWDER knocks down flames and, on burning solids, melts to form a skin smothering the fire. It can be used on wood, cloth,

paper, plastics, coal etc. (fires involving solids) as well as liquids such as grease (except chip or fat pan fires), oil, paint and petrol.

Neither type of fire extinguisher cools the fire very well and care has to be taken that the fire does not re-ignite. They are best used outside the home because of the mess produced, e.g. to deal with motor-vehicle fires and fires in garages/sheds.

- **Vaporising Liquid (including Halon)**

This type of fire extinguisher produces a vaporising liquid gas which gives rapid knock down of flames by chemically inhibiting combustions. Used on liquids such as grease (except chip or fat pan fires), oil, paint and petrol. Owing to the ozone depleting potential of halon, its future use and availability will be restricted - the production and consumption of new halon ceased in 1994. **It is therefore strongly recommended that this form of extinguisher is not purchased.**

2.3 Fire blankets

A burning chip pan or frying pan in the kitchen is one of the most common kinds of household fire which can be a frightening experience occurring with very little warning. A fire blanket is by far the most effective way with which to deal with such a fire. They are made of fire-resistant material (usually woven glass fibre) and are recommended for both smothering chip or fat pan fires or for wrapping round a person whose clothes are on fire. The fire blanket should conform to the appropriate British/European Standards. It should be marked to show whether it should be thrown away after one use or used again after cleaning in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Fire blankets should be kept in the kitchen, but not directly above the cooker or a heater because flames leaping upwards from the hob will make it difficult and dangerous to reach the blanket.

3. Fire Safety

Many fires are caused by lack of concentration or carelessness and it is important to be aware of the dangers and try to prevent fire starting in the first place. It is also sensible to know what to do should a fire be discovered. As a general rule, everyone should leave the house as quickly as possible and the Fire Brigade should be called. Should the fire be discovered in its very early stages some householders may think they can deal with it themselves. The first thing to remember is that even small fires spread very quickly, producing smoke and fumes which can kill in seconds. If there is any doubt, the fire should not be tackled, no matter how small it appears to be. The following simple code should help in deciding what to do if a fire occurs:

*Do not move the object on fire.

*Only tackle a fire if it is in its very early stages. For most types of fire a small amount of water applied at an early stage in the fire can control the potentially hazardous situation more effectively than applying a larger amount of water at a

later stage. However, **never** put water on fat pan fires or electrical fires and **never** use a fire extinguisher on chip or fat pan fires.

*Never tackle a fire if it is starting to spread or if the room is filling with smoke. The most common cause of fire deaths is being overcome by smoke or fumes.

*If you cannot put out the fire or if the extinguisher becomes empty, get out closing all the doors behind you as you go.

*Always put other people's and your safety first. Make sure that everyone else has got out of the building and that you can escape if you have to. Ensure that someone calls the Fire Brigade from a neighbour's house, call box or mobile phone.

*Before opening a closed door use the back of your hand to touch it. Do not open it if it feels warm - the fire will be on the other side.

*If you are cut off by fire try to remain calm. If you are unable to use the door because of flames or smoke, close the door and use towels or sheets to block any gaps. Try to make your way to a window. If the room becomes smoky crawl along the floor, where it will be easier to breathe because smoke rises. Open the window and try to attract the attention of others who can alert the Fire Brigade.

Remember: If in doubt get out, get the Fire Brigade out and stay out until a fire officer has told you it is safe to re-enter your home. Always call the Fire Brigade even if you have managed to put the fire out. They are the experts and will make sure that the fire is properly extinguished. They do not charge for this.

3.1 Chip and fat pan fires

When cooking in a fat pan or deep fat fryer, never fill it more than one-third full with oil or fat and never leave the pan unattended when the heat is switched on. If the oil begins to give off smoke, do not put any food in the pan and turn off the heat to allow it to cool. To test the temperature of the oil, put in a small piece of bread - if it crisps up quickly the oil is ready.

If the oil does catch fire, do not move the pan. Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so but **never** lean over the pan to reach the cooker controls. Place a fire blanket, or (if one is not available) a damp tea cloth or towel, over the pan to smother the flames, ensuring that your hands are protected by the cloth. If a tea cloth or towel is used, it should be as wet as possible without dripping. **Never throw water onto the fire.** The pan should then be left to cool down for at least 30 minutes.

3.2 Electrical fires

Around 28,000 fires in the home are reported each year as being caused by electrical faults, accidents or by misuse of electrical equipment. The greater flammability of many old buildings make them particularly vulnerable but it is not always the wiring of the house which is at fault. Risks can be significantly reduced by taking a number of simple preventative measures.

All electrical appliances (particularly television sets) should be unplugged when not in use, especially at night, and the correct fuses always fitted. Plugs should be removed carefully, not by pulling the flex, and they should conform to the appropriate British/European Standards. Overloading a power point by using several adapters in one socket can cause it to overheat and catch fire. If an adapter is used, ensure it is of good quality with the correct fuse. Electric blankets should be properly maintained, correctly used and serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Timeswitches should not be used for unsuitable appliances, such as electric blankets or radiant heaters - they may come on unexpectedly and cause a fire. When buying any new electrical equipment, ensure that it has been tested and approved by the appropriate British/European regulatory authority.

Flexes should be checked from time to time and should not be joined or run under rugs or carpets. It is important to have the wiring of the house checked regularly, especially if the property is over 15 years old. Look out for warning signals of dangerous wiring - hot plugs and sockets, fuses which blow for no apparent reason, lights flickering or brown scorch marks on sockets and plugs. You should ask your electricity supplier or a qualified electrician to check your wiring immediately if you see any of these danger signs - regular checks of the wiring should help prevent them from occurring. DIY wiring should not be attempted unless the person is very competent. Do not store old newspapers, polish, paint, spirit cleaning solvents etc. in the cupboard under the stairs where the electricity and gas meters are located. A fire under the stairs can prevent escape from upstairs and the stairwell often acts as a chimney causing smoke to rapidly spread vertically, cutting off escape.

In order to reduce the risk of an electrical fire breaking out (and to provide some protection against shock) it may be worth considering the installation of an Earth Leakage Circuit Breaker (or Residual Current Detector) if one is not already fitted. This equipment will detect the slightest bit of leakage and instantly cut off the power supply. A qualified electrician should be consulted in this respect.

If an electrical appliance or fitting does catch fire, the switch at the main fuse box should be turned off before any attempt is made to deal with the fire. Water should never be used on a burning appliance if the electricity is still turned on and note that water should not be used on a television or computer even after the power has been switched off because residual electricity may remain in the unit for some time. CO₂ extinguishers can be used on 'live' equipment.

In the kitchen, always make sure that saucepans are in a safe position on the cooker. Handles should not stick out over the edge of the cooker, where they can be knocked over or left within the reach of young children. Ensure that the handles are not over a hot ring or burner. Flexes from electrical equipment, such as kettles and toasters, should be kept well away from the cooker and tea towels should never be dried over the cooker. Saucepans should never be left unattended with the heat turned on and ovens should not be left on after use.

3.3 Planning an escape route

If a fire occurs in your home you may have to get out in dark and difficult conditions. Escaping from a fire will be a lot easier if you have already planned your escape route and know where to go. Make sure that your planned escape route remains free of any obstructions and that there are no loose floor coverings that could trip you up. Everyone in the house should be made aware of the escape route.

If any member of the household has serious mobility difficulties you may wish to consider having their bedroom on the ground floor (if this is practical) and as near as possible to an exit. If someone needs assistance to escape, it is vital that they have some means of summoning help by their bed, i.e. a buzzer, intercom or telephone. There are also systems available which will automatically dial out on your telephone line to summon help or send a signal to a manned control room. Details of the many emergency call/alarm systems can be obtained from the Disabled Living Foundation whose address is given at the end of this leaflet.

The new Parsonages Design Guide ('The Green Guide') makes detailed recommendations on the security of new, purpose-built, parsonages and many existing clergy houses are already equipped with security measures ranging from basic precautions such as exterior lights and window locks to additional precautions such as closed-circuit television cameras and reinforced external doors in high risk areas. While these are designed to deter potential intruders from breaking into the house, care must be taken to ensure that such precautions do not hinder escape from a fire. For example, where locks are fitted to upstairs opening windows, it is essential that the occupants of the house know where the keys are and that they are readily accessible in the event of a fire. In addition, laminated glass should never be fitted to upstairs windows and locks should not be fitted to this type of window on the ground floor. The Fire Brigade does not recommend "gaoler's gates" and steel bars or shutters on windows since these may prevent swift escape from the house if the keys cannot be found quickly. Rescue from outside may also be made more difficult and valuable time could be lost.

The local Fire Brigade's Safety Officer should be consulted when considering the provision of any significant security measures to be sure that the safety of the occupants will not be prejudiced in the event of a fire.

3.4 Additional tips on fire safety in the home

1. Never leave matches or lighters where children can find them.
2. Never leave a lit cigarette or pipe unattended - it may fall onto an armchair or carpet which could catch fire, giving off dense smoke and fumes.
3. Do not use candles where there are safer alternatives. If you do, never leave them unattended and extinguish them properly.
4. Use fireguards around fires and heaters to protect children and never sit too close to a fire. Clothes or the chair itself could be easily set

- alight, particularly if you fall asleep. Never place clothes on the guard to dry or put papers on the guard.
5. Always stand portable heaters in a safe place where they cannot be knocked or tripped over. Keep them well away from furniture and soft furnishings, such as curtains and cushions and never place them next to beds or where objects may fall onto them.
 6. Check that your furniture conforms to current fire resistant standards. Look for the warnings on labels.
 7. Turn off and unplug electrical equipment unless it is designed to be left on.
 8. Keep curtains well away from any cooker and television sets.
 9. Do not leave aerosols in direct sunlight or use them near flames, hot electric elements or other potential sources of ignition. They may contain a flammable propellant gas.
 10. Do not place mirrors or bottles in direct sunlight as concentrated sun-rays can start a fire. Windows with a glass lens-like piece imitating old glass should not be used in south-facing windows.

Further information concerning fire safety in the home may be obtained from the following:

Your local Fire Brigade Safety Officer (*contact your local Fire Station*)

Home Office Fire Safety Publications
Room 153
Publicity and Campaigns Unit
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT
Tel: 020 7273 2756

Building Research Establishment
Bucknall Lane
Garston
Herts WD2 7JR
Tel: 01923 664 000

Fire Research Station (*see Building Research Establishment*)

London Fire and Civil Defence Authority
Albert Embankment
London SE1 7SD
Tel: 020 7587 4283 Fax: 020 7587 4289

Ecclesiastical Insurance Group plc
Beaufort House
Brunswick Square
Gloucester GL1 1JZ
Tel: 01452 528533

The following addresses may be useful for people with disabilities:

Royal National Institute for Deaf People
9-23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL
Tel: 020 7296 8000 Fax: 020 7296 8199 Textphone: 020 7296 8001 (Minicom)

Royal National Institute for the Blind
224 Great Portland Street
London W1N 6AA
Tel: 020 7388 1266 Fax 020 7388 2034

National Federation of the Blind of the UK
Unity House
Smyth Street
Westgate
Wakefield
West Yorkshire WF1 1ER
Tel: 01924 291313

Disabled Living Foundation
380-384 Harrow Road
London W9 2HU
Tel: 020 7289 6111 Fax: 020 7266 2922

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)
Unit 12 City Forum
250 City Road
London EC1V 8AF
Tel: 020 7250 3222 Fax: 020 7250 0212 Textphone: 020 7250 4119 (Minicom)

SENSE
11 - 13 Clifton Terrace
Finsbury Park
London N4 3SR
Tel: 020 7272 7774 Fax: 020 7272 6012 Textphone: 020 7272 9648 (Minicom)

A separate leaflet on recommended security measures in parsonages (including advice on day-to-day security precautions and personal safety in the home) is available on request from:

**Pastoral Division
Church Commissioners
Tel: 020 7898 1000
Fax: 020 7898 1873
Email: pastoral@churchofengland.org**