



# HOW TO CONDUCT A **CHURCH FIRE DRILL**

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



[safetysabbath.org](http://safetysabbath.org)



## Why Should We Conduct **Fire Drills?**

Since 2015, Adventist Risk Management has received over 200 property fire claims, placing at risk the lives and wellbeing of church members and prospective members.

We conduct fire drills to ensure that our congregations are best prepared for effective evacuation. Holding regular fire drills familiarize occupants with the sound of the alarm system and allows your church to practice in real time. So in the event of a real fire, congregants are not overwhelmed 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.





# Before the Drill

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 or military and medical training. Designate duties for your crisis team members, which include:
  - ▶ Directing congregants to an emergency assembly area or areas, outside and away from the building (at least 150 feet). This area should be in a location that will not interfere with arriving emergency vehicles/personnel.
  - ▶ Assisting limited mobility congregants 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.
  - ▶ Review the provided assessment tool and discuss how to best communicate objectives to members, including
    - ▶ disseminating the do's and don'ts resource one to two weeks before.
    - ▶ Create a set of steps to promote situational awareness in your congregation. This includes basics like location of fire exits and designated safety area. With the increase of mass shootings, it is also important to be aware that, in rare cases, a fire alarm may be a false alarm or a trap setup by an active shooter
    - ▶ 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 don't 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 the police and review their strategy for responding to a shooting 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.





## Educate **Your Congregation**

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. Share our helpful do's and don't resource, giving the congregation a good sense of what makes for an effective evacuation and what doesn't. 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.





# Conduct the Drill

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 **your 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 ensure that all have evacuate—and when possible—all doors and windows are closed behind them.
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 you had assist 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.
- Complete the drill assessment tool, discuss the results with crisis management team, and bring feedback to church board.

Maintaining records and other notes will provide you with the benefit of information gleaned from past events. After reviewing all notes, revise your emergency 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 three or four additional 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 the worship service. You might plan one for a midweek service at night. Emergency situations can happen at anytime, so be prepared.

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# Church Emergency Planning Resources



At Adventist Risk Management, Inc., our ministry is to protect your ministry. Use the resources online at [AdventistRisk.org](https://AdventistRisk.org) and those below to help protect your facility and those under your care.

- [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\) Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Resources](#)
- [Fire Safety article](#)
- Emergency Planning at [adventistrisk.org](https://adventistrisk.org).
- The [Close Before You Doze](#) public fire safety education program
- [Why schools should rethink the century-old fire drill emergency response approach](#)





Adventist Risk Management,® Inc. (ARM) is invested in the safety and success of your ministry. We provide risk management resources to help you protect the people and physical assets at the heart of your ministry. Our ministry is to **protect** your ministry. Learn more at [AdventistRisk.org/About-Us](https://AdventistRisk.org/About-Us). #ARMcares



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