



The Safety Officer

From small medical incidents like a trip and fall, to an emergency situation such as severe weather or an active shooter, having a safety plan is critical to protect your members. A safety officer can provide leadership in this area that is mission-driven, practical, and effective. Whether you are a new safety officer or have held the position for a number of years, the following information will help you understand how to shepherd your church members using best-practices in prevention and emergency-response.

A Team Effort

Protecting people and property requires a team effort, you should work in support and cooperation with the church body including the church pastors, elders, the church board, and members. You may be asked to lead a Safety Committee with representative leadership who will support you in achieving safety goals across ministry functions. Good communication and a mission-focused approach between all is crucial to the successful protection of the church.

There are a few key tasks and processes that you can help to spearhead as a leader in the area of safety and risk management:

SELF-INSPECTIONS

A key component to preventing losses is to identify and correct hazardous conditions before accidents happen. With the assistance from a member or members of the safety committee, perform a walk-through of the church at least once a year. Hazards can come up quickly and unexpectedly. More frequent surveys allow you to catch these hazards before potential incidents occur. All staff, elders, deacons, and volunteers should be vigilant and report or correct hazards when identified. **The Church Self-**

Inspection Form, available on AdventistRisk.org, will help guide you through the church inspection process.

MAINTENANCE

Many of the losses the church experiences such as slips, trips, and falls could be prevented through more careful, regular maintenance. These simple hazards such as broken steps, potholes, cracked sidewalks, torn and wrinkled carpet, gravel, twigs or other debris on walk-ways, or wet floors from inclement weather or spills can cause very serious injury which lead to costly medical bills and lawsuits. Make sure the right team or persons are in place to conduct regular **seasonal maintenance** and who can take ownership of promptly correcting these conditions as soon as they are identified.

SECURITY

In some churches the role of planning for security will be part of a Safety Officer's role and in others it will be its own role. Security is more than cameras and alarms installed on doors and windows. A security program designed to protect people and property includes measures that provide access control, increased visibility through the trimming of vegetation, good lighting (inside and out), and training for



security and hospitality volunteers. Everyone must be observant and responsive to suspicious activity such as people with strange behaviors, unattended packages, and other situations. Work with your hospitality volunteers to engage with people entering the church campus and building and set protocols in place to communicate suspicious activity to decision makers.

For some churches, security may also mean the visible presence of a trained security team. Always coordinate your efforts with local law enforcement. Work with your **safety committee** to discuss the security needs of your church.

EMERGENCY PLANS AND PREPAREDNESS

For most churches, it's business as usual week after week. But that can change in an instant, particularly areas prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or tornados. Some churches may have the potential to experience riots, or even random acts of violence. Every church has the potential for a medical emergency. Determine the primary exposures of your church and update or create the church emergency plan to include these risks. Both leaders and members should be prepared to react appropriately to disasters as they arise. Make sure doors can be exited in an emergency (panic hardware is required in many jurisdictions) and doorways, aisles, foyers, and steps are kept clear of anything (even chairs) to guarantee a clear means of exit in the event of an emergency. Consideration should be given for the safe evacuation or shelter for children, and those with limited mobility. You can find **emergency planning resources** on AdventistRisk.org.

ACTIVITIES

List and evaluate church activities. Some are low risk, while others are high risk and carry a potential for accidents and injuries. Establish a process to properly analyze each activity before approval (ARM has a resource for this on our website **Adventistrisk.org**). The process should include provisions for safe transportation, safety equipment, medical releases and permission forms for each activity. With the help of your safety committee, develop written guidelines and rules based on what your congregation can do in its local context. Some activities will need to be modified; others may not be possible. Maintain a list of those approved and those that are denied. Church board approval will be required for some. Coordinate with your conference when you have questions and to make use of their resources.

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

Protecting the Vulnerable such as our children does not take place simply in Children's Ministries or the Pathfinder club. Our children are an integral part of all church activities and a wholistic approach to protecting them is needed to be effective. Work with the screening coordinator, children's department leaders, facility managers, pastors, and elders to ensure the whole church is working together to protect our children and all vulnerable persons. A model **Child Protection Plan** is available at Adventistrisk.org

TRANSPORTATION

The potential for major incidents increases when transportation needs are not carefully thought out. A poorly maintained vehicle or using a careless driver could result



Safety Officer

in disaster. Never use **15-passenger vans** for any purpose. Ensure that vehicles are maintained on a regular schedule. Vehicles should have a pre-trip inspection to ensure all systems are in working order as well as a post-trip inspection to ensure it is fit for its next use (ARM has a resource for this on our website Adventistrisk.org).

ACCIDENTS

The church safety officer and safety committee will conduct an investigation of incidents or accidents that occur at the church, during an activity, or in transit.

Investigations help identify the causes and determine what actions might help prevent similar accidents from occurring again (ARM has a **resource** for this on our website Adventistrisk.org).

An Important Role

You have a big responsibility and an excellent opportunity to promote safety and risk management throughout the church. This is vital in protecting the church's reputation, keeping members and guests safe, and advancing the mission of the church.

*It is an important role,
and your efforts are appreciated.*



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. #ARMcares



REPORT YOUR CLAIM RIGHT AWAY
1.888.951.4276 • CLAIMS@ADVENTISTRISK.ORG

STAY INFORMED
ADVENTISTRISK.ORG/SOLUTIONS



This material is fact based general information and should not, under any circumstances, be considered specific legal advice regarding a particular matter or subject. Please consult your local attorney or risk manager if you would like to discuss how a local jurisdiction deals with any specific circumstances you may be facing.