

End Notes ^① *wfm*



OSHA Workplace Safety Regulations Apply to Churches, Too

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The church where I grew up experienced tragedy in 2006 when the maintenance supervisor was fatally electrocuted while working on the church's sign. While his death was accidental, churches often do not realize the dangers employees face while working on church grounds; and governmental regulations are in place to protect workers and the church.

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The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), part of the U.S. Department of Labor with headquarters in Washington, D.C., offers regulations that apply to any private sector employer with one or more workers, including churches. The caveat with churches is that the regulations only cover the secular activities of the church, not religious worship or ministry services. Secular activities include daycare centers, maintenance and cleaning crews, and business office or administrative staff. OSHA focuses on employee training requirements, protective equipment availability and use, and a general commitment to mitigate job hazards, when possible, that can lead to employee injury or death.

Here is a quick self-assessment to test your church's OSHA compliance:

- Do you provide your maintenance staff with proper hearing, eye, and hand protective equipment, and do they use it regularly? Do they bypass any safety guards or latches on mowers or power equipment?
- Is your cleaning staff trained on chemical storage and exposure risks?
- Are all your cleaning supplies labeled properly and do you have Material Safety Data Sheets for every chemical on site?
- Does your daycare or childcare staff use latex gloves when dealing with blood or bodily fluids?
- Have you examined your administrative staff's workstations for ergonomic design?
- Are your fire exits properly marked and are the paths of egress clear?
- Does your staff know where to find fire extinguishers and have they been trained on how to use them?
- Do you keep training records for each employee on what safety topics they are trained in, and do you provide refresher training annually?

- Do you have the OSHA workplace poster positioned where it's visible to employees?

If you answered yes to each of these questions, you are well on your way to OSHA compliance and providing a safe working environment for your employees. Visit www.osha.gov for more specific safety topic information and additional safety checklists.

For those of you who answered no to any of the above questions, there are a few more things you should know. First of all, OSHA can do an inspection of your facility at any time. OSHA inspects about 1% of all workplaces each year, but if OSHA does come to your door, it helps to be prepared. Keep all training records in a centralized location and assign a knowledgeable staff member to act as escort for the visit. Any violations discovered during an inspection can result in a fine for the church ranging from a few hundred to tens of thousands of dollars.

Secondly, the church must report to OSHA any employee fatalities or serious injuries and keep a log of all other minor injuries. Finally, there are services to help your church become compliant. OSHA offers education outreach options, including consulting services separate from the inspections division, which can be scheduled through your state's OSHA office. In addition, numerous safety training firms exist that can manage your safety program for a relatively low cost and little time investment.

Churches have a duty to provide a safe working environment for their employees. Protect your employees now and you'll have happy and healthy employees for years to come.

OSHA regulations can be complicated to navigate and interpret. Be sure to contact your state's OSHA office for clarification or more information.

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