



“Huffy and Friends”

Tulsa Firefighter’s Educational Clowns

4306 South Peoria, Box 911, Tulsa, OK 74105

Office: (918) 610-8122 Fax: (918) 622-0833

E-mail: huffytheclown@cox.net

Web Site: www.tfdclowns.com



Fire Safety for Churches

Thousands of fires occur at worship centers annually!

Prevention – *The Best Way to Keep from Getting Burned.*

Two million fires – many of which are preventable – destroy buildings, valuable equipment and most tragically, lives each year. According to the National Fire Protection Association, thousands of fires occur at worship centers annually, costing millions of dollars.

Thankfully, even with the multiple – and seemingly uncontrollable – causes of fires, including arson, lightning and faulty wiring, there are practical things you can do to protect your building, its contents and your congregation from this age-old danger.

Arson

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, 573,000 fires resulting from arson are reported each year. Arson is the No. 1 cause of fires at worship centers in the United States. Houses of worship are easy targets for arsonists since many are empty during much of the week (especially at night) and are constructed of wood and furnished with wooden pews, statues and other highly flammable items.

Fortunately, the risk of arson can be greatly reduced by making a few simple precautionary adjustments to your building and the surrounding area.

In the event that someone does manage to intentionally start a fire on your property, the adjustments you make now can make the difference between minor damage and total destruction.

Visibility is key. The more your building is visible to passersby and patrolling officers, the safer your building is from arson and other crimes. Some suggestions for increasing that visibility include illuminating the building, keeping shrubs and trees trimmed, making sure that signs do not block the view of the building, installing security fences and enlisting the help of others to keep an eye on your facility.

Another way to reduce fires being deliberately set is to keep combustibles out of the reach of would-be vandals.

Lightning

Lightning — another common cause of fire at worship centers — can come into the building via the electrical panel, which can spark and ignite nearby combustibles.

It's important to have at least 36 inches of open space around electrical panels so that if there is a short, sparks won't hit anything and ignite a fire.

Combustibles

Due to celebrations throughout the year, particularly during the holiday season, worship centers need to be especially diligent about combustible decorations such as candles, holiday lights, paper and cloth.

Candles are a big fire hazard in churches. Palms, for instance, go up like matches. It can help to spray inflammable substances on greenery and other decorations to help reduce the risk of an uncontrolled fire.

Another approach is to use electric advent candles. Make sure to turn off the electric candles, as well as the sound equipment, before closing the building.

Faulty Wiring

The electrical wiring in some worship centers — particularly older buildings and those that predate the use of electricity — might not be adequate to handle the electrical demands of modern conveniences, such as air conditioning, organs and sound equipment.

If your building was built prior to 1970, it is a good idea to have the wiring inspected by a professional electrician. There also are other precautions you can take, such as:

- Checking the fuse box to be certain that the proper fuse size is use for each circuit.
- Inspecting all electrical and extension cords and disposing of any frayed, cracked or dried-out cords.
- Making sure all junction boxes, wall sockets and light switches are properly covered.

Precautionary Measures

If a fire does occur at your worship center, there are several precautions you can take to ensure your congregation's most valuable asset — its members — are able to reach safety in a timely and efficient manner.

All exits should include lit exit signs, and doors should open outward with no inside locks or fasteners.

This is especially important in high-occupancy buildings and on Sundays when there are many people in churches.

By law, public buildings must also have fire extinguishing equipment. In addition to placing them in conspicuous areas, church officials and members need to know how to use them so it's a good idea to hold training sessions for employees and volunteers in your congregation.

Codes for fire extinguishing equipment vary by location. Consult your local fire department for local laws and regulations. However, the general rule is having at least one portable fire extinguisher within 75 feet of any location, with a minimum of one extinguisher on each level of the building.

Make sure to have all fire extinguishers mounted at 36- to 54-inch heights so that they are easily accessible for anyone needing to use them. It's also important that extinguishers be professionally serviced at least once a year to ensure they're in good working order.

A key component to fire safety — and one that is often overlooked — is ensuring that fire lanes at church entrances are open at all times.

A common theme at churches, especially those in congested areas, is a lack of parking so people sometimes park in fire lanes, which is a really bad idea. If there are cars blocking the entrance to the church during a fire, the fire truck and paramedics/ firefighters can neither get to the building to give injured people the help they need nor control the fire.