



## FACT SHEET

# Property Maintenance

**A well maintained property provides a safe, manageable and enjoyable environment for everyone who works there or visits. Owners and occupiers of Church properties must keep on top of maintenance if they are to meet their duty of care obligations and comply with the conditions of their insurance policy.**

Under work health and safety laws, Church organisations have a duty of care to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Gradual deterioration and wear and tear caused by normal use can weaken built structures including roofs, fences, play equipment and sheds making them unsafe.

Not only is a poorly maintained structure potentially unsafe, it is also far more likely to sustain damage during a severe storm or natural disaster. It may also have a shorter life span and be more expensive to repair in the long run.

For example, the cost of repairing a few broken roof tiles identified during a regular inspection is likely to be fairly low, especially when compared to the cost of replacing an entire roof if the damaged tiles weaken the overall structure, rendering it unfit to withstand the force of a serious storm.

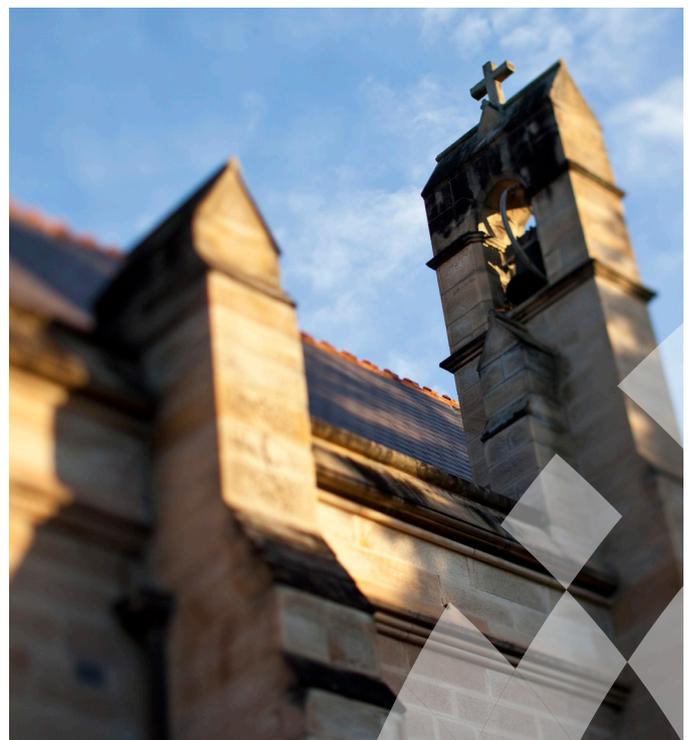
Owners and occupiers of Church properties are responsible for identifying and addressing maintenance issues. Failing to do so may constitute a breach of their obligations as well as their duty of care to workers, volunteers, students, parishioners and visitors.

It's also important to note that property insurance policies generally do not cover damage resulting from gradual deterioration. In fact, failing to address basic maintenance issues may lead to the denial of all or part of an insurance claim. For example, it's possible an insurance claim to replace a storm-damaged roof could be denied if the damages were found to be the result of poor maintenance. Subsequent damage caused by the storm, such as water or debris entering the building through the roof, might be covered.

### Understanding the risks

While a poorly maintained property may be more likely to sustain serious damage during a storm or other natural disaster these structures may also be unstable or unsafe even during normal day-to-day use. Beyond the obvious and very serious risks this presents to life and property, it could also disrupt business processes, prevent the delivery of important services and lead to serious financial losses.

While all built structures require maintenance, roofs are particularly prone to wear and tear. A building's capacity to cope with extreme weather will be largely dependent on the state of its roof. Leaks, rust, missing or cracked tiles, pooling water, improperly installed flashing, blocked gutters or surface erosion can weaken a roof structure making it more susceptible to damage, and therefore dangerous for everyone who uses the property.



Other key areas of concern include:

- ◆ Fences
- ◆ Gates
- ◆ Brickwork
- ◆ Worn or damaged floor coverings including sporting courts.
- ◆ Paths of travel
- ◆ Vermin including termites, mice and rats

It's important for Church organisations to understand and manage the risks associated with property maintenance.

### Implement a maintenance and inspection program

Keeping your property safe and in good repair involves having a sound maintenance and inspection program tailored to the risks in your area, any specific guidelines in place for your state or region, the age of your structures and their primary purpose.

A documented, proactive inspection program, demonstrating a proper level of due diligence may also help in the event of a liability claim or prosecution.

Your maintenance and inspection program should cover:

- ◆ Provisions for an annual inspection of the entire property by an external professional contractor
- ◆ Who will conduct your inspections. Larger organisations may have maintenance workers, others may need to assign the role to workers who hold other positions.
- ◆ What your inspections will cover i.e. roofs and gutters, fire safety equipment, car parks, electrical switchboards, heating and cooling systems etc.
- ◆ How frequently inspections will be conducted. A major inspection should happen on an annual basis, but it may be possible for basic inspections to be carried out more frequently, perhaps by a worker walking the perimeter of a building and noting any changes or concerns.
- ◆ How you'll record any maintenance issues identified and ensure they are followed up.
- ◆ How you'll prioritise maintenance jobs.
- ◆ Who will be responsible for carrying out maintenance work or overseeing professional contractors.

### Consider maintenance when planning new buildings

Maintenance should also form part of the decision process for all new builds and renovations. Things to consider include:

- ◆ How external building materials will weather and the kind of upkeep they require.
- ◆ How elements of the design will affect maintenance tasks. For example, if a building has very high ceilings will specialised equipment such as scissor lifts be required to carry out simple jobs like changing batteries in smoke detectors or checking roof cavities?
- ◆ Whether materials are fit for their purpose. For example, whether floor coverings in high traffic areas like school gymnasiums have been tested to withstand heavy usage.
- ◆ That the maintenance schedule and budget are appropriate.
- ◆ That maintenance tasks can be carried out safely.
- ◆ How incidents will be reported and investigated where necessary.



## Communication and training

Appropriate training and awareness sessions should be conducted for workers, including volunteers and contractors involved in property maintenance. This could take the form of a group session or a one-on-one briefing depending on age, experience and location.

## Monitoring and review

Policies and programs should be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis to ensure all details are up-to-date. Reviews should also be completed after an incident like a storm or following any changes to buildings or property.

Monitoring of relevant guidelines, regulations, standards and building codes for your area is essential. Legislation is frequently updated, regulations amended, equipment specifications and training requirements often change. Church organisations must ensure they are compliant at all times.

## Practical help

CCI has a number of useful resources on this and many other topics available by calling *risksupport* on **1300 660 827**.

They include:

- ◆ Managing Risk in Organisations – Conducting a Risk Assessment, Developing a Risk Treatment Plan
- ◆ Making your Workplace a Safe Place – Developing a Work Health and Safety Management System
- ◆ Incident Reporting and Investigation Fact Sheet
- ◆ Business Continuity Management Fact Sheet

## Legislation, guidelines and codes of practice

For building codes and regulations specific to your area contact your state or territory government or visit Building Codes of Australia [www.abcb.gov.au](http://www.abcb.gov.au)

If you would like further information about Property Maintenance, please contact the *risksupport* Helpdesk on:

**1300 660 827**  
[helpdesk@risksupport.org.au](mailto:helpdesk@risksupport.org.au)

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