

Guidelines for Electrical Installations and Maintenance in Churches - DAC Guidance Note

Health and Safety legislation (Electricity at Work Regulations 1989) says that every electrical installation must be properly maintained. Churches are important places and special care needs to be taken when carrying out any electrical works.

Electrical installations must not only be safe and compliant with current regulations but they should also respect the historic character and fabric of the church.

Church insurers may recommend that electrical wiring should be inspected and tested to ensure it is safe every five years so it makes sense to commission an Electrical Installation Condition Report at the same time as the quinquennial inspection.

- When carrying out any electrical works connected to the mains supply at your church It is important to employ contractors who are members of one of the following trade associations:
An NICEIC contractor (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting)
A Full member of the ECA (Electrical Contractors Association)
A Full Member of NAPIT (The National Association of Professional Inspectors and Testers) without a 'Limited Scope membership'

You should always check that contractors hold valid insurance documents – both Public Liability cover (min £5,000,000) and Professional Indemnity insurance if their work includes an element of design.
- Your church architect should be involved in the planning of all wiring routes, including surface mounted cables and conduits, and the proposed locations of new electrical equipment such as light fittings, power outlets or PA speakers. They should advise on the location and type of fixings used.
- The use of uPVC trunking is not permitted under any circumstances. Neatly clipped wiring with fixings into mortar joints is far less obtrusive and can be painted to blend in with the background.
- Fixing into stone should only be made into the mortar joints between stones rather than the stones themselves, and fixings onto decorative carving and mouldings should be avoided. Use of pattress plates or battens to enable this should be considered if direct fixing into mortar joints is difficult
- Fixing into historic plaster should be avoided, but if it is necessary, then care must be taken to ensure that the fixings do not penetrate wall paintings. In such cases, it may be necessary to seek specialist advice to identify whether wall paintings are present.
- Cables should be routed in such a way that minimises their visual impact on the interior of the church. Internal corners, wall plates, string courses and other architectural features should be used to enable cable runs to be disguised or hidden.
- PA speakers, light fittings or any other equipment should not be fixed to sensitive fabric nor should they obscure important detail or detract from the character of the church.
- The careful choice of finish for wiring and equipment can help reduce its visual impact. Where possible wiring should be painted out to match the background colour. Where the wiring is vulnerable to accidental damage then the use of MICC or MICV (sheathed), or FP200 Gold cable should be considered.
- Consideration should be given to access for ongoing maintenance of equipment and fire safety. For example, by not locating heat generating equipment (halogen spot lights etc) near timber or flammable fabric or locating the electronic drivers of LED light fittings remotely rather than having them as an integral unit. The driver will fail long before the LED light fitting and to have it easily accessible will lower the cost of on-going maintenance.

Further advice is contained in the following Church Buildings Council guidance publication:

Electrical Wiring Installations in Churches

http://www.churchcare.co.uk/images/Guidance_Notes/Electrical-Wiring.pdf