



# 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 plan for safety is critical to protect your people. 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 people using best prevention and emergency-response practices.

## A Team Effort

Protecting people and property requires a team effort including the church pastors, elders, the safety committee, the church board, and members. Good communication and a mission-focused approach between all is crucial to the successful protection of the church.

## 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 before potential incidents occur. All staff, elders, deacons, and volunteers should constantly be vigilant and report or correct hazards when identified. The Church Self-Inspection Form, available on [AdventistRisk.org](http://AdventistRisk.org), will help guide you through the church inspection process.

## Slips, Trips and Falls

Slips, trips and falls generally remain a primary cause of church accidents. They can be caused by broken steps, potholes, cracked sidewalks, torn and wrinkled carpet, gravel, twigs or other debris on walkways, or wet floors from inclement weather or spills. Make sure the right team or persons take ownership of promptly correcting these conditions as soon as they are identified.

## Security

Security is more than cameras and alarms installed on doors and windows. A security program designed to protect people and property includes increased visibility through the trimming of vegetation, good lighting (inside and out), and other elements. Everyone must be observant and responsive to suspicious activity such as someone lurking in shadows or hallways, unattended packages, and other situations. Work with your hospitality volunteers to ensure that persons entering the church campus and



building are engaged, and suspicious activity is always communicated to decision makers. For some churches, security may also mean the visible presence of a trained security team. 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 in an area 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. Determine the primary exposures of your church and update or create the church emergency plan. 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. Find more emergency planning resources on [AdventistRisk.org](http://AdventistRisk.org).

## Activities

List and evaluate church activities. Some are low risk and high gain, while others are high risk with little to gain and carry a potential for accidents and injuries. Establish a process to properly analyze each activity before approval. The process should include provisions for transportation, safety equipment, medical release forms for youth under 18, and parent/guardian permission slips for each activity. With your safety committee, help develop written guidelines and rules, and be prepared to recommend some activities be prohibited. Maintain a list of those approved

and those that are prohibited. Church board approval will be required for some. Coordinate with your conference when you have questions.

## Transportation

When transportation needs are not carefully thought out, the potential for major incidents increases. A poorly maintained vehicle or a bad driver could result in disaster. Selecting too small of a vehicle can lead to "overloading," sloppy vehicle handling, and loss of control. Know how many people need transportation and how much gear will be packed, then plan accordingly. Never use 15-passenger vans for any purpose. Leasing a bus and driver from a reputable agency is an option to consider, as opposed to the use of personal vehicles which can expose the church to potential accidents and liabilities.

## Accidents

When incidents or accidents occur at the church, during an activity, or in transit, the church safety officer and safety committee will conduct an investigation. Investigations help identify the causes and determine what actions might help prevent similar accidents from occurring again.

## An Important Role

You have a big responsibility and an excellent opportunity to promote safety throughout the church. This is vital in protecting the church's reputation and people to continue its mission.

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

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