Church Guidance Note

Trees

Many churchyards contain a large number of beautiful trees. They form a natural part of the overall landscape, bringing wide and many varied benefits as well as contributing to the overall aesthetic appeal of your church premises.

However, trees, if not properly managed, can cause serious damage. In windy conditions, they may fall onto or lash against the church building itself, neighbouring property or cars. Root movement can cause the collapse of boundary walls. Roots can also absorb soil moisture causing foundations to move and walls to crack. They can encroach upon the foundations of neighbouring buildings, causing subsidence or damage to drains.

Tree roots can also cause injury where they become trip hazards themselves or where they disturb paving slabs or other footpath surfaces. On very rare occasions, branches have been known to fall and strike people. Yew trees are extremely toxic to livestock (and humans)

Legal requirements

Depending on your own particular circumstances, you may have to meet certain duties under the 2005 Safety, Health and Welfare At Work Act. Where these apply to you, you will have to do all that is 'reasonably. practicable' to ensure that people are not exposed to a risk to their health and safety.

This does not mean that all trees have to be individually examined on a regular basis. A decision has to be taken on what is reasonable in your particular circumstances. This will include consideration of the risks to which people may be exposed.

In addition to this, you may need to manage your tree stock to meet responsibilities under other legislation or show that you have met your duty of care to:

Risk Advice Line

Should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk-related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact our Risk Management Team

01 6190300

(Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, excluding bank holidays)

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- Reduce the risk of property damage from subsidence
- Maintain stocks to preserve their amenity, conservation and environmental value
- Prevent personal injury or vehicle damage.

Relevant legislation includes the Occupiers' Liability Act, 1995 and legislation relating to planning issues and Tree Preservation Orders.

Hazards to look out for

Some typical hazards include:

- Signs of decay at abrupt or 'dog-leg' bends
- Signs of decay caused by fungi or decay at the stem base
- Cracking in the trunk, lower stems of branches or in the ground
- Gaps in or poor condition of the crown
- Excessive swaying in the wind
- Exposure of previously sheltered trees
- Splitting at branch forks
- Grafts showing incompatibility
- Neglected pollards
- Ribs and open cracks on stems and major branches
- Possible damage after bad weather, e.g. storms*.

Precautions you can take

The precautions you will have to take will depend upon the number, species and condition of the trees at your church including any specific hazards they present. Typical precautions could include:

- Branch reduction or removal
- Correct topping and pruning
- Regular re-cutting of pollards
- Using correct arboreal techniques (e.g. to avoid creating large wounds)
- Cable or belt and/or rod bracing of branches
- Crown reduction
- Felling, if other options are not adequate or feasible
- Keep Yew trees away from boundaries
- Periodic professional tree inspections*.

*This list is not exhaustive.

Making a start

Action	Guidance
1. **Identify the groups of trees that you have responsibility for. Take account of their position and the degree of public access to them.** **Make a note of these.**	This will help prioritise any risks associated with your tree stock, and decide if any checks, inspections or other precautions are needed.
2. **Decide what risk the trees at your church present and what further checks or inspections are necessary.** **Where these are necessary, complete them at appropriate intervals, making a note of the outcome.**	You may need to make arrangements for your trees to be inspected periodically. To help you decide what is required, you should classify your trees into 'zones', including all the trees at your church for which you are responsible. You should then identify those: • In areas of high public access • That could fall onto areas of public use • That could fall onto property that could be damaged. Normally, the best person to do this is someone familiar with the land, how the church is used and what trees are present with reference to published guidance. Usually, it does not require a tree specialist to complete this. Trees can then be divided into two zones: • **Zone One** – where there is frequent public access to trees (e.g. popular foot paths, car parks, at the side of busy roads or where property may be affected). As a rough guide, trees in Zone one are those that are closely approached by many people every day • **Zone Two** – where trees are not subject to frequent public access. For trees in Zone One, a system of periodic, proactive inspection is appropriate. This will vary depending on your particular circumstances. For example, individual tree inspection is only likely to be necessary in specific circumstances where a particular tree: • Is in a place frequently visited by the public or could fall onto or into areas of public use or damage other property • Has structural faults that are likely to make it unstable; and • A decision has been made to retain it with these faults.

Making a start

Action	Guidance
	Trees in areas of low public use may only require irregular inspection, if any. Formal or more detailed inspections will need to be completed by those who have the necessary expertise, training and experience, such as an Abortist or a Tree Surgeon. You will also need to consider how you will obtain specialist assistance and take remedial action when checks reveal defects outside the experience and knowledge of the person carrying out the check. If you identify any trees on neighbouring land which could present a risk to the church premises, you should write to the landowner advising them of your concern and requesting them to take appropriate remedial action. You should retain copies of any correspondence. You should keep adequate records of any zones (maps may be useful here); inspections or other checks made; trees presenting a serious risk; any treatment or other precautions taken; and when tree work has been carried out.
3. Ensure that any necessary precautions are taken and remain effective. **Act on any issues of concern reported to you so that any additional precautions necessary are taken.**	Any checks or inspections that are completed should identify what additional precautions are necessary. The hazards set out on the previous page identify some of the precautions that might be necessary. However, this list is not exhaustive and the precautions you take will need to reflect your own particular circumstances. You may also need to consider: • How people can report incidents (such as vehicle collisions) resulting in damage to the trees at your church premises • Additional checks following potentially damaging activities (such as work by utility companies in the vicinity of your trees or following storm or severe gales) • Any additional precautions that might be needed to protect those visiting your church premises during high winds (for example, closing or restricting access to footpaths or car parks). Where trees are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order, the Local Authority should be consulted prior to any work being carried out.

Making a start

Action	Guidance
4. Ensure that employees (and volunteers in these circumstances) involved in any inspection or minor tree work are provided with necessary information and training. **Make a note of any information or training that is provided.**	The level of information and training required will vary depending on the tasks involved reflecting your particular circumstances. If you have completed any risk assessments, these will help you determine what is necessary.Those involved in formal or more detailed inspection of trees must be suitably competent. Whilst it is accepted that experienced, competent members of the church can carry out minor work on trees, anything major (e.g. felling, pruning etc.) must only be carried out by a competent arboriculturist. This is usually because such work tends to present a relatively high risk of injury to those involved and may involve the use of specialist equipment (such as chainsaws). Those completing such work must be appropriately trained, adequately insured and provided with any necessary protective equipment If you do provide any information, equipment or training for your employees or volunteers, you should keep records of this. These should contain detail relating to the persons who were trained (including their signatures to say that they have received and understood the training); when they were trained and by whom and an overview of the training that was provided.
5. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for tree management. **Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid. Retain records of the notes you have made in steps, 1, 2 and 4 above.**	If you have prepared a Safety Statement record these as part of it. You can use our Church Safety Statement template if you haven't done this and need one to comply with health and safety law.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at

https://www.ecclesiastical.ie/risk-management/risk-management-guidance/

A good deal of relevant guidance has been produced by various organisations. Examples include:

- **The Tree Council of Ireland see https://www.treecouncil.ie**

Need to report an incident involving an injury?

If an incident occurs that may result in a claim for injury, please retain any accident investigation records e.g. accident book entry, photos etc. and contact our specialist claims team on **01 619 0300** – (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm) for advice. Where you have received correspondence about a claim being made against you, it is important that you notify us immediately and email a copy to our experts on **Ireland_claims@ecclesiastical.com**

Report a claim

Do you need to report a claim? If so, you can call us on **01 619 0300**. Our normal office opening is 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays. Alternatively, you can send us an email to **Ireland_claims@ecclesiastical.com** It's helpful if you can have your policy number available when making contact.

Policy cover queries

For queries about your policy cover, call our specialist church team on **0**1 619 033 (Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, excluding bank holidays) .

Alternatively, please visit https://www.ecclesiastical.ie/church/

This guidance is provided for information purposes and is general and educational in nature. It should not be used as a substitute for taking professional advice on specific issues and should not be taken as providing legal advice on any of the topics addressed.

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