Portable Electrical Appliances in Churches

Introduction
Electricity can be the cause of accidents and fires within Churches and Places of Worship. Some serious accidents involving electricity can be fatal and fires can be started by faulty electrical equipment or wiring. Whilst the permanent wiring and electrical equipment installed in churches is inspected on a quinquennial basis or when major alterations to the electrical system are to be made, portable electrical appliances such as electric fires, kitchen appliances, video or music equipment, vacuum cleaners or any other appliance brought in on a temporary or semi-permanent basis still pose a risk and must be tested in accordance with the provisions of the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989. The term "portable appliance" can be used for most pieces of equipment that are fitted with a mains plug, usually a 13 Amp mains plug.

In addition to the danger posed by electric shock, some appliances such as heaters and stage lighting give off heat, and can be a further cause of electricity-related fires if they are not used correctly. Heat can also be produced by overloaded sockets or wiring, through damaged electrical cabling or equipment or a loose connection.

Electrical Portable Appliance Testing (PAT)
Portable appliances should be tested and inspected routinely. The requirements of the Regulations include in addition to a visual test, a test that ensures the electrical integrity of the appliance. This can only be performed using equipment designed specifically for that purpose and will require the services of a suitably qualified person, perhaps the engineer who normally carries out the church’s Quinquennial Electrical Test.

It is often assumed that Portable Appliance Testing should be completed annually but the frequency of the test will depend on the type of equipment and where it is used. The testing should certainly form a part of any quinquennial test.

Each appliance should be numbered and labelled together with the date of the test and its next due testing date akin to motor vehicle MOT Testing. It would also be good practice to have a nominated member of the PCC with responsibility for checking labelling as well as initiating action. It is important that a written record of the introduction of any portable appliance into the church should be kept together with the dates of its testing and records of maintenance or repairs.

A notice should be displayed in a suitable place warning that untested appliances must not be used in the church.

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Extension Leads

Extension leads are often used to enable an appliance to be used some distance from a mains outlet but these should be avoided if possible. These extensions and cables must also undergo a Portable Appliance Test. Additional lengths of cable should not be added on to the flexible cord of appliances and, because of the risk of overloading sockets, do not use multi-socket adapters.

With all electrical equipment, follow the manufacturer's guidance and instructions and use the equipment only for its intended purpose. Don't trail cables where they could be a trip hazard, near water or near equipment that gets hot and make sure that ventilation holes are kept free of obstruction.

PS
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