

Tips on Preventing Fire During Construction

Prior to Construction

Discuss the project with the fire department and request a site visit and assistance in developing a fire protection plan for contractors and a fire department emergency response plan. The latter would help identify valuable stained glass windows and the location of historic artifacts that could possibly be saved in the event of fire.

Develop a written disaster preparedness plan identifying measures to be taken in case of a fire, including those related to securing the building, installing temporary roofs, salvage operations, documentation of existing conditions, insurance notification, etc.

Make fire safety an important consideration in project budgeting to ensure funding for fire-prevention equipment and properly trained staff. Project specifications should be written to

include methods and responsibility for controlling fire. Criteria for contractor selection should include previous performance with respect to safety. The successful bidder should submit a written fire protection plan for review.

Appoint one key person to represent the congregation in the evaluation of the plan, to liaison with the contractor throughout the project, and to be contacted in the event of a fire. For some projects, retaining an independent consultant to serve as fire protection coordinator throughout the project is warranted.

Install hard-wired smoke and heat detectors connected to a 24-hour centrally-controlled alarm system. At a minimum, install battery-operated smoke detectors.

Maintain up-to-date inventories of assessments of building contents. Keep a complete set of documentary photographs of the buildings and its contents, including stained glass windows.

Keep important original materials off-site or in fireproof vaults such as at an insurance office, historical society, or bank safe-deposit box.

During Construction

To the extent possible, seek alternatives to potentially hazardous processes such as those using open flames. When hazardous devices and materials are necessary for projects such as removing paint with heat guns, on-site welding with an open flame, or installing a new roof with a torch:

place a minimum of two fire extinguishers within fifteen feet of the area assign a dedicated person to maintain a fire watch in the immediate vicinity of these hazardous processes require frequent inspections of the building several hours following completion of work each day since many fires initially go undetected and flare up later remove combustibles from the area or, if not possible, provide fire resistant coverings over all combustibles within ten feet of the work obtain metal fire shields for placement immediately behind the point of actual work routinely notify building security and management when the activities will be taking place confirm with the contractor that all workers are trained in the use of hazardous devices and materials, as well as in safety procedures -- in many cities and counties, including New York City, operators must be licensed to use propane torches and equipment must be approved by the fire department ensure at the close of work each day that all fire protection systems (alarm, detection, and suppression) are operational

When chemical solvents are used, make sure to properly ventilate all areas to prevent the accumulation of fumes that can cause an explosion.

Use non-flammable drop cloths and tarps.

Store all flammable liquids in fire proof cabinets outside of the building. All construction debris and used materials should be removed from the building on a daily basis.

Prohibit smoke on the job-site.

At the completion of any exterior work that could have disturbed a lightning protection system, have it inspected immediately by a qualified installer.

In the event of a fire, always call the fire department even if the fire appears to have been extinguished.