



# Preventing Arson and Vandalism

According to a 2015 study, arson was the leading cause of church fires between 1995 and 2015. During that time, 51% of all fires in houses of worship were due to arson. It's relatively easy to commit arson because it doesn't require breaking and entering and the perpetrator can be long gone before the flames are noticed. Many of the same precautions taken to discourage arsonists also discourage burglars and vandals. By taking a few preventative steps, you can help curb arson and protect your church against losses due to fire.

## Improve General Security

- Develop and maintain a fire emergency plan and communicate it to your staff and volunteers.
- Train staff and volunteers to lock all doors, windows and skylights prior to leaving the building for the day – especially entrances in the rear of the building and into the basement.
- Train employees to be watchful and immediately report suspicious actions.
- Install and use an alarm system and make sure key employees know how to activate the system. Make sure the alarm system is monitored by a reputable monitoring company.
- Limit the number of entrances in use (but do not lock fire exits when the building is occupied).
- Limit access to roofs, fire escapes and outside stairways to authorized persons.
- Trim trees and shrubs to keep them away from doors and windows and minimize areas to hide.
- Keep your property well-lit at night. It is best to leave exterior lights on at night.
- Repair any damage promptly. The sooner you repair vandalism, the less chance there will be more.
- Ensure that doors and windows are in good repair and that locks are working. Make sure doors with glass do not have easy access to the deadbolts if the glass is broken.
- Protect first floor windows and glass entries with wire mesh or bars (note that for emergency purposes, window bars must be able to be opened from the inside).
- Keep a list of key holders. Never hide a key outside your building. Change locks periodically and issue new keys.
- Ask local law enforcement to perform a Vulnerability Assessment of your facilities.
- Ask your local police to patrol your property at least once a night, varying the times throughout the week.
- Schedule custodial crews at night to deter activity.
- Report any acts of vandalism or suspicious activity to local law enforcement immediately.



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- If your building is vacant, board up windows and remove all combustible material from interior and exterior of property. Also, be sure to sufficiently heat the vacant building to ensure that sprinkler lines do not freeze.
- Have outside organizations sign a building use agreement, stating that they will assume responsibility for any damage or injury resulting from their use of your facility. The agreement should contain indemnity language and put the user on notice of the required insurance coverage. The agreement should require that any liability insurance purchased by the user should name the church and its officers as additional insureds.

## Add Fire Prevention

- Install smoke detectors, automatic and tamper-proof sprinklers and other fire safety equipment.
- Regularly check and replace batteries on smoke detectors.
- Clear your church and the parking lot of fuel sources such as landscape trimmings, paper rubbish, leftover paint, old rags and other trash. Don't let packaging, waste and rubbish accumulate anywhere on the premises.
- Keep trash containers away from the church and its buildings.
- Empty exterior trash containers daily.
- Keep dumpster enclosures locked when building is unoccupied.
- Secure flammables in a locked fire-resistant cabinet if you cannot store them away from church property.
- Dispose of all flammable waste materials as quickly as possible (check with local authorities for approved methods of disposal).
- Establish frequent and regular fire prevention patrols with other business and home owners in your area.
- Gaps under all entrance doors should be as narrow as possible to prevent anything from being pushed under the doors.
- The most all-encompassing fire extinguishers are multi-type, class ABC dry chemical extinguishers. They can be used on all types of fires. Make sure you have several throughout the building and that they are regularly checked.

For more information, please visit [www.InsuranceBoard.org](http://www.InsuranceBoard.org) or email [LossControl@InsuranceBoard.org](mailto:LossControl@InsuranceBoard.org).

References:

[https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/arson\\_prevention\\_houses\\_of\\_worship/](https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/arson_prevention_houses_of_worship/)



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