

Risk Alert



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Combat water damage with prevention

One of the worst things that can happen in a worship center is finding the floor flooded with large amounts of water from a faucet or a toilet that has failed when no one was around. If an average faucet flows at 2.5 gallons per minute, just an hour of free water flow can mean 150 gallons of water or more flooding the main floor or running down stairs affecting multiple floors. Water can damage pulpits, walls, floors, hymnals and more. Water damage is the second leading category of property damage reported in houses of worship after only wind and hail.



Where can this occur? Anywhere there is active water service—such as a sink, toilet, drinking fountain or baptistry—there is a chance for water failure.

Unanticipated water often occurs when supply hoses are worn or ruptured or there is a leak at the connection. Maintenance of any building involves a scheduled checkup of all plumbing and fixtures. It is important to have the plumbing of your buildings checked at least yearly to ensure that it is in good working condition. If you find a worn hose, replace it. When checking pipes, look for leaking joints and exercise shut-off valves. Five-year-or-older valves may not operate when needed if not regularly exercised. Neglecting to fix leaks and drips will inevitably lead to further and more costly damage. When a leak is detected, take immediate action to reduce damage to your building and contents. Turn off the water to stop the leak, move endangered items, begin cleanup operations and repair the leak.

Special areas of concern

The baptistry

Water damage from a baptistry is most common during the filling or draining process. Stay near the baptistry when filling or draining to react and turn the water off immediately if a problem occurs. Check that the overflow drain allows water to flow freely to avoid overflowing the baptistry and check around the baptistry for any hints of water leakage.

The Sunday school restroom

These restrooms are typically used sparingly during the week before Sunday school participants use them. Verify that the toilet flushing mechanisms work properly and the sink faucets and drains flow normally. A common water damage occurrence in the Sunday school restroom is an overflowing toilet from a small toy that becomes lodged after the toilet is flushed. Check these toilets regularly for foreign objects.

(Over)

Sprinkler systems

Sprinkler systems need to be checked on a regularly scheduled basis by a sprinkler contractor to ensure that they are active and operating correctly. Visually spot check sprinkler systems between scheduled visits.

Cold weather

Cold weather can cause pipes to freeze and burst. Leaks and burst pipes can cause extensive damage. To protect against freezing, insulate pipes, especially those that run along an outside wall, or keep sink cabinet doors open during cold snaps. Also insulate pipes in the crawlspaces and attic. These exposed pipes are most susceptible to freezing. Heat tape can also be used to wrap pipes. Maintaining a minimum temperature of 50 degrees Fahrenheit inside all buildings can help avoid building pockets getting too cold.

If the building is unoccupied for an extended period of time, the best protection is to have the water shut off and the water lines drained. This would mainly be for buildings that are only used seasonally or because they are for sale. Note: shutting off water will affect your sprinkler system. Make sure you know which valve is which if shutting off the main valve. Closing the wrong line may lead to other problems. Failing to find the main valve may mean turning off each valve individually. Seek the advice of a professional plumber who can shut off the valve at the water meter. Creating a routine each time the building is left for an extended period of time can reduce the likelihood of a disaster and keep work to a minimum when you return.

Other water damage prevention tips

Move valuables off the floor in case there is flooding. Keep valuable items, like musical equipment, electrical appliances, woodwork or antiques, off the floor. Do not leave appliances that use water, such as a dishwasher, running while unattended.

For a complete collection of the *Risk Alert* series, visit our Web site and look in the Safety Resources section.