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Storage requires planning, discipline

Spring cleaning isn't just for the home. Religious organizations also can benefit from setting aside time to freshen up their facilities. Although washing windows and cleaning floors are traditional tasks, spring is the perfect occasion to organize and clear out clutter while tackling any storage issues.

Inadequate storage space, compounded by too many possessions, is an issue faced by many places of worship. As items in storage compile over the years, they begin to spill out of conventional storage areas and into places not designed or safe for storage, such as boiler and mechanical rooms.

"Clutter and crowded storage spaces aren't just inefficient, they also are dangerous," said Karin E. Fried, a certified member of the National Association of Professional Organizers and the owner of Organizational Consulting Services in North Olmsted, Ohio.

Storage areas stacked to the ceiling with heavy boxes could easily fall and injure someone. Clutter tends to block walkways, hallways and exits, presenting a tripping hazard and limiting escape options in the event of a fire or emergency.

Respect the space

Worship centers especially tend to accumulate a large number of items over the years — from holiday decorations and boxes of files to old audio equipment and cleaning supplies.

"Purging items in storage at least once each year can help keep areas organized and efficient," said Peter Walsh, organization expert for the popular TLC show "Clean Sweep."

There are many different techniques for sorting through possessions; however, most involve a process of categorizing items into piles to keep, sell or donate and throw away. Walsh provides detail about his keep, sell or toss method in the Q&A feature on Page 4.

"Be realistic about the items you plan to keep, especially any items in storage that have not been used within the past year," Walsh said. "Generally, about 80 percent of what goes into storage never gets used."

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(storage)

Clear out clutter and items in storage with these tips:

- Pick one area to focus on at a time — start small with a closet or storage shelf.
- Bring adequate bags and boxes to the decluttering area for items that will not be kept.
- Don't keep an item if it exists somewhere else, such as information and files available electronically.
- Determine whether broken items are worth repairing.
- Consider the relevance of keeping electronics, such as old computers, tapes and video cassette recorders.

Once items are sorted, assess the available storage area and identify a system that will work within the space constraints.

"Take a close look at the way you currently organize things," Walsh said. "Can you find items easily, and do they emerge from storage in good shape?"

"Make the most of your storage space by using a combination of racks, shelving units and storage containers, such as boxes and bins," Fried said. "There are so many inexpensive options available — find a system that meets your needs and stick with it."

"Once like items are grouped and contained, identify storage zones in the room and clearly label the zones," Walsh said. "For example, holiday decorations belong in one area and cleaning supplies in a separate area.

"Then set a limit for the number of items that can fit into each zone. If you allocate three shelves to holiday decorations and each shelf fits two bins, then six bins is the limit. Once you need a seventh bin, you'll need to let go of some decorations before you can add more. There cannot be a seventh bin."



Additional tips for creating organized storage areas include:

- Clearly label bins or boxes with the contents and the date last used.
- Consider using see-through bins for easy identification.
- Cluster like items together in storage areas or bins.
- Make storage convenient by positioning frequently used items toward the front of shelves.
- Store frequently used items as close as possible to where they are used.

Avoid dangerous storage space

Keep storage areas safe by enforcing simple rules and avoiding potentially dangerous locations:

- Do not store materials closer than 18 inches below the plane or horizontal level of sprinklers. Materials stored too close to a sprinkler can block the sprinkler's effective range.
- Keep storage in nonsprinkler areas of buildings 24 inches or more below the ceiling. This allows water to be directed over storage in the event of a fire. Storage in small rooms and closets may reach the ceiling around the perimeter of the room.
- Do not store flammable or combustible materials too close to furnaces, water heaters, boilers and other mechanical equipment. These types of materials present a heightened fire risk.
- Keep a clear path for moving safely around a storage room. Refrain from storing boxes or other items, even temporarily, in designated walkways.

Plan for the future

When adding on or building new facilities, anticipate all future storage needs.

"Building for today is not a good strategy," Fried said. "Look 10 to 20 years down the road and consider the types of activities and membership growth your organization will experience and plan accordingly with storage spaces and closets."

Consider all storage needs when planning ahead — from where boxes of items will be stowed to how tables and chairs will be stored.

Resources

- **For more information** and tips on storage and organization, visit:
 - www.organizationalconsultingservices.com
 - www.professionalorganizer4u.blogspot.com
- **For more information** on the risks of using a boiler or furnace room for storage, visit www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources" and select "Buildings and Grounds" and then "Boiler Safety."



Seasonal Spotlight

Top property concerns

I've been reviewing the claims involving damage to property reported by Church Mutual customers in 2009, and I would like to share some of my key takeaways.

Church Mutual handled more than 19,000 property claims last year, and more than 56 percent of them fell into three categories:

- Wind and hail
- Water damage
- Electrical fires

Wind and hail is our category for weather-related losses. With the exception of hurricanes and tropical storms, weather losses come with little to no warning, so steps to prevent losses can be hindered.

The best move you can make today to help reduce the severity of a weather loss is to practice proper roof maintenance. Roofs should be inspected annually and any necessary repairs performed promptly.

Water damage is the No. 2 cause of property damage at religious organizations. Leaking pipes, plumbing fixtures, drinking fountains and sprinkler systems, as well as frozen pipes and sprinkler systems that burst, are conditions that cause the most damage.

However, these are areas that can be addressed by a maintenance program. Leaks don't just go away. If you discover a problem, call a plumber.

Electrical fires only account for less than 7 percent of the fire claims, but they cause 29 percent of the fire loss damage.

Old wiring that hasn't been inspected in decades, faulty wiring, old appliances with frayed power cords and the overloading of circuits with power strips are some of the main culprits.

If your building is more than 10 years old, you should have the electrical system inspected by an electrician. Annually inspect the power cords of all appliances and resist the temptation to utilize power strips and extension cords as permanent wiring.

Richard J. Schaber, CPCU, CRM
Risk Control Manager

To assist you with inspections of your facilities, order Church Mutual's "Self-Inspection Safety Checklist for worship centers, schools and related facilities." Go to www.churchmutual.com and select "Safety Resources."

Simple steps reduce falls from heights

Falls are the No. 1 cause of injury at religious organizations. Serious injuries are often associated with falls from elevated surfaces, such as choir risers, outdoor decks, stages and bleachers. Although not all falls can be prevented, basic safety steps and precautions can help reduce the frequency in which falls occur.

Survey the area

Before worship services or other events begin, have at least one person inspect the area for potential problems. Staff should ensure all areas, including choir risers, bleachers and balconies, are structurally sound and free from clutter or trip hazards.

"Prior to an event, we have a team of 10 to 12 supervisors comb through the grounds and amphitheater checking for trip or fall hazards, lighting or basically anything that could create a problem for one of our patrons," said Michael DeMarco, director of security for Summerfest, The World's Largest Music Festival, held in Milwaukee, Wis.

DeMarco is responsible for the safety and security of nearly 1 million music lovers that flock to Summerfest each June to see more than 700 bands perform on 11 different stages.

Install sturdy railings

"Outdoor porches, gazebos and choir risers all have railings that meet our 'hip-high, no lower rule,'" DeMarco said. "Railings that are too low can actually become hazards."

Any surface greater than 30 inches above grade is required by the International Building Code to have a guardrail. Rails should be at least 42 inches tall and be designed without openings or projections that could catch loose clothing.

"Inspect all railings annually to look for structural weaknesses," DeMarco said. "Replace railings that are too low or deteriorating."

Light the way

All elevated areas and walkways should be well lit. Illuminate any areas with dark spots or shadows during outdoor functions at night. Steps should be visible at all times — track lighting or glow-in-the-dark tape should be used.

Be aware of weather

Inclement weather introduces new safety challenges, such as slick floors and handrails or wind gusts that can lead to trip-and-fall hazards.

"Be ready to make quick adjustments when the weather turns," DeMarco said. "For example, when winds pick up at Summerfest, we always make sure all umbrellas are closed. This prevents them from flying off and becoming tripping hazards."

Anti-slip treads should be placed over wet or worn-out steps for extra traction. During winter months, make sure pathways, staircases and rails are free from ice and snow.

- **For more information** on preventing falls, visit www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources" and scroll down to "Workplace Safety."

Q | A

A Perspective

Storage is a problem for virtually every religious organization. Oftentimes, this problem stems from a combination of having too many possessions and lacking adequate storage space.

Risk Reporter spoke with Peter Walsh, a best-selling author and organization expert for the TLC show “Clean Sweep” and “The Oprah Winfrey Show.”



Walsh shared his tips for how religious organizations can take steps to declutter and organize their space.

- **Walsh shares additional organization tips,** information and resources on his Web site, www.peterwalshdesign.com.

Risk Reporter: Inadequate storage space is an issue for many religious organizations. What do you recommend to help make the most out of small storage areas?

P. Walsh: Storage space is a chronic problem. People always say they don't have enough space, but it's the wrong statement. You only have the space you have. The space is finite. It's the volume of stuff that is the variable.

When you take on the task of organizing, you have to make some hard decisions about whether to allocate more space or cut down on the volume of things in order to fit the space you have.

Risk Reporter: What is your personal philosophy on clutter?

P. Walsh: There are two types of clutter — “memory” clutter and the “I might need it one day” clutter. “Memory” clutter reminds you of an important person, a particular achievement or something from the past. “I might need it one day” clutter is what you hold on to in anticipation of imagined futures.

Neither type of clutter is wrong, remembering the past or preparing for the future, as long as it does not overwhelm your ability to live or function in the present.

“Memory” clutter is fine as long as it doesn't take over a space. Once it does, you have to ask yourself what is more important — holding on to the property or being a slave to the object? If the object is important, display it in a spot of honor for others to enjoy or be enriched by it.

Places of worship need to trust in the future to deal with “I might need it one day” clutter. Make a sensible decision about what is reasonable to expect from the future and, subsequently, what's reasonable to hold on to. Pass on unused items to someone who will benefit from it and use it.

Risk Reporter: On “Clean Sweep,” you often use the keep, sell, toss method to help homeowners get organized. Will this same method work for places of worship?

P. Walsh: Religious organizations especially need to be good stewards over their property and possessions. It is important to respect the space and its limitations. The keep, sell, toss method works just as well for religious institutions as part of the annual process of decluttering and organizing.

Divide clutter and storage items into three separate piles — one pile to keep, one pile to sell or donate and one pile to toss. Make sure that everything left in the keep pile will fit comfortably within the space allocated for storage. If not, conduct the process again with everything left in the keep pile, allocating more to sell, donate or toss.