



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA
STAD KAAPSTAD



DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT CENTRE

PROTECTING PLACES OF WORSHIP

Safety, Preparedness and Community
Resilience Training Programme

Making progress possible. **Together.**



01 Introduction

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY AND PREPAREDNESS IN PLACES OF WORSHIP

Places of worship have historically been spaces of peace, reflection, and community connection. Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and other sacred spaces bring people together across cultures and generations. They are intended to be places of safety and spiritual support.

However, in recent decades, places of worship around the world have increasingly become targets for acts of violence, terrorism, hate crimes, and other emergency incidents. These attacks are often designed to cause fear, divide communities, and undermine the values of tolerance and unity that faith communities represent.

GLOBAL INCIDENTS

Several tragic incidents around the world highlight the need for preparedness:

- The **Christchurch Mosque Shootings** in New Zealand where two mosques were attacked during Friday prayers.
- The **Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting** in the United States.
- The **Sri Lanka Easter Bombings**, where churches and hotels were targeted on Easter Sunday.



These events demonstrate that places of worship can unfortunately become symbolic targets during acts of extremism or hate-driven violence.

INCIDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa, despite its reputation for diversity and religious tolerance, has experienced incidents highlighting the need for vigilance. The St. James Church Massacre on July 25, 1993, was a politically motivated attack where four armed men opened fire during a Sunday evening service, killing 11 and injuring 58. This assault shocked the nation and the international community, particularly because the multiracial congregation was known for its anti-apartheid stance and efforts towards reconciliation during the sensitive period before the 1994 democratic elections.

More recently, in July 2024, an armed shooting occurred at a mosque in Brooklyn, Cape Town, during Friday prayers. Additionally, in June, 2018, a fatal stabbing attack took place at a mosque in Malmesbury, Western Cape, where an unknown assailant, who had been praying with worshippers, suddenly attacked congregants with a knife, resulting in two deaths.

Other challenges faced by places of worship in South Africa include:



Fire hazards due to overcrowding or electrical faults



Stampedes during large gatherings



Medical emergencies during services or events



Suspicious packages or bomb threats



Criminal activities such as theft or armed robbery

These risks make it essential that places of worship implement basic safety and emergency preparedness measures.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Safety at places of worship is a shared responsibility. Leaders, volunteers, staff members, and congregants all play a role in ensuring that these sacred spaces remain safe environments for worship and community engagement.

Through awareness, training, and preparedness, faith communities can reduce risks, respond effectively during emergencies, and protect the wellbeing of all who gather in their spaces.



02 Legislative and Policy Framework

The Safer Places of Worship Programme (SPW) is aligned with international, national and local legislative frameworks that govern disaster risk management, fire and life safety, and urban resilience. These frameworks provide the legal and policy basis for promoting safety, preparedness, and coordinated emergency response in places of worship.

2.1 United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites (2019)

The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites (2019) provides a practical framework to prevent and respond to attacks on places of worship through risk awareness, preparedness, and cooperation between authorities, faith leaders and communities. The SPW Programme supports this approach by strengthening local safety planning, promoting protective measures, and improving coordination with emergency services to help ensure safe and peaceful worship.

2.2 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 provides the foundational basis for the SPW Programme by protecting the rights to human dignity, life and security of the person, as well as freedom of religion, belief and opinion, and the right to assemble peacefully. These rights require that spaces where communities gather for worship are protected from preventable harm and that safety risks are responsibly managed. The programme supports these constitutional principles by strengthening preparedness, promoting safety measures, and improving coordination with emergency services to safeguard congregants, staff, volunteers, and visitors.

2.3 Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002)

The Disaster Management Act (DMA) provides the overarching legislative framework for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response, and recovery in South Africa. The Act emphasises a proactive, preventative approach to disasters and assigns responsibilities to all spheres of government, as well as to organs of state and communities. This programme supports the objectives of the Disaster Management Act by empowering faith institutions to play an active role in disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness at a local level.

2.4 National Disaster Management Framework (NDMF), 2005

The National Disaster Management Framework gives practical effect to the Disaster Management Act and outlines how disaster risk management must be implemented across South Africa.

The programme aligns particularly with:

- **Key Performance Area 1:**
Integrated Institutional Capacity, by strengthening coordination between places of worship, disaster management centres, and emergency services
- **Key Performance Area 2:**
Disaster Risk Assessment, through basic risk identification within places of worship
- **Key Performance Area 3:**
Disaster Risk Reduction, by promoting preventative safety measures and compliance
- **Key Performance Area 4:**
Response and Recovery, by improving emergency response readiness and evacuation planning



2.5 The Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 (Act No. 85 of 1993)

The Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 (Act No. 85 of 1993) and its regulations support the programme by promoting basic health and safety controls in places of worship, including hazard identification, safe facilities and electrical practices, and emergency readiness (evacuation routes, signage and first aid) during services and events.



2.6 Fire and Life Safety By-laws

Municipal Fire and Life Safety By-laws regulate fire prevention, fire protection systems, emergency exits, occupancy limits, and evacuation procedures within buildings used by the public, including places of worship.

This programme supports compliance with Fire and Life Safety By-laws by:

- Promoting awareness of safe occupancy levels
- Encouraging clear emergency exits and evacuation routes
- Improving understanding of fire extinguisher use and basic fire prevention
- Highlighting the importance of regular inspections and drills

2.7 National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act, 1977 (Act No. 103 of 1977)

The National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act establishes minimum safety standards for the design, construction, and maintenance of buildings.

For places of worship, the regulations are particularly relevant to:

- Structural safety
- Emergency access and egress
- Fire protection measures
- Safe use of buildings for public gatherings

The programme raises awareness of these requirements and encourages faith institutions to ensure that their facilities are safe, compliant, and suitable for large gatherings.

2.8 Integrated Development Plan (IDP): Safe City Pillar

The programme is aligned with the Safe City pillar of the IDP, which focuses on creating safe, inclusive, and resilient urban environments.

The Safe City pillar emphasises:

- Crime prevention and safety in public spaces
- Protection of vulnerable communities
- Strengthened partnerships between government, communities, and civil society
- Preparedness and rapid response to emergencies

By supporting safety and preparedness in places of worship—key community assets—the programme contributes directly to the Safe City vision and strengthens social cohesion, trust, and resilience at neighbourhood level.

03 What This Programme Is About

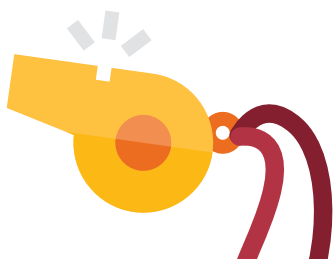
The **Places of Worship Safety and Emergency Preparedness Programme** has been developed to assist religious institutions across South Africa in strengthening their safety, compliance, and emergency response capabilities.

The programme provides practical guidance and training to religious leaders, administrators, volunteers, and community members on how to:

- Identify potential risks and vulnerabilities
- Implement safety and compliance measures
- Respond effectively during emergencies
- Protect congregants and visitors
- Work with local emergency services
- Promote unity, tolerance, and interfaith cooperation

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

The programme aims to:



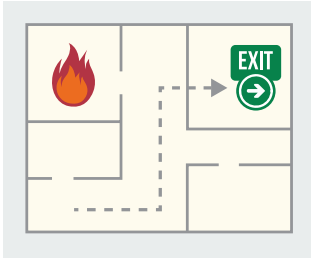
Improve Safety Awareness

Participants will learn how to recognise potential risks and hazards within places of worship.



Strengthen Emergency Preparedness

Faith institutions will be equipped with the tools to develop and implement effective emergency plans.



Enhance Compliance

The programme helps places of worship understand basic compliance requirements related to fire safety, occupancy, and emergency procedures.



Build Community Resilience

Training encourages collaboration between faith communities, emergency services, and local authorities.



Promote Interfaith Tolerance

One of the core principles of this programme is building mutual respect and cooperation between different religious groups. By working together on safety initiatives, faith communities can strengthen social cohesion and promote peace.

04 How the Programme Will Be Rolled Out

The training programme will be delivered through structured workshops, practical demonstrations, and scenario-based exercises designed specifically for places of worship.

Each module focuses on critical safety areas.

4.1 Emergency Planning and Preparedness

This module focuses on developing clear and effective emergency response plans for places of worship.

Participants will learn how to:

- Conduct basic risk assessments
- Develop emergency evacuation plans
- Establish assembly points
- Create emergency communication procedures
- Assign safety roles and responsibilities
- Coordinate with local emergency services

Faith institutions will also be guided on how to conduct regular drills and ensure that staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities during emergencies.

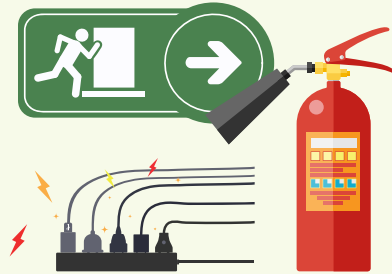


4.2 Fire Safety and Compliance

Fire safety is one of the most important aspects of protecting places of worship, especially during large gatherings.

This module covers:

- Fire risk identification
- Safe occupancy levels
- Fire prevention measures
- Fire extinguisher use
- Emergency exits and evacuation routes
- Electrical safety



Participants will also gain insight into compliance requirements aligned with South African fire safety regulations and municipal safety standards.

4.3 Bomb Threats and Terrorism Awareness

While rare, bomb threats and acts of terrorism can occur and must be handled carefully and professionally.

This module provides guidance on:

- Recognising suspicious behaviour or packages
- Responding to bomb threats
- Evacuation procedures during suspected threats
- Coordination with law enforcement
- Crowd safety and protection

Participants will also learn basic principles of situational awareness and how to maintain calm and orderly responses during high-risk situations.



4.4 4.4 Emergency First Aid

Medical emergencies can occur at any gathering, particularly where large groups of people are present.

This module introduces basic life-saving techniques including:

- Basic first aid principles
- Responding to heart attacks and strokes
- Managing bleeding and injuries
- Assisting people who collapse or lose consciousness
- CPR awareness
- Managing crowd medical emergencies

Participants will gain practical knowledge that can help stabilise individuals until professional medical services arrive.



05 How to Attend the Training

Faith institutions, religious leaders, administrators, and volunteers are invited to participate in the Places of Worship Safety and Emergency Preparedness Programme.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

The training is designed for:

- Religious leaders and clergy
- Church, mosque, synagogue, and temple administrators
- Security volunteers
- Ushers and event coordinators
- Youth leaders and community volunteers
- Facility managers

Having multiple representatives from each place of worship is encouraged to ensure that safety knowledge is shared within the organisation.

TRAINING FORMAT

The programme will be delivered through:

- In-person workshops
- Interactive presentations
- Practical demonstrations
- Scenario-based exercises
- Discussion sessions

Participants will receive training materials and guidance that can be implemented within their respective institutions.

REGISTRATION

To register to participate in the programme, contact the Disaster Risk Management Training Centre on the following details:



Contact:
021 444 8197



Email:
training.disaster@capetown.gov.za



Training schedules will be communicated to participating organisations in advance.

COMMITMENT TO SAFER COMMUNITIES

By participating in this programme, places of worship take an important step toward protecting their congregations and strengthening community resilience.

Preparedness not only saves lives—it also reinforces the shared values of cooperation, tolerance, and peace among South Africa's diverse faith communities.

