

Portable Appliance testing for churches

There are many common myths about portable appliance testing (PAT). The key facts about the inspection and testing of portable electrical equipment is set out in the Q & A's below.

What is PAT testing?

Portable appliance testing (PAT) is the term used to describe the examination of **portable** electrical appliances and equipment to ensure they are safe to use. Generally any piece of electrical equipment which has a plug fitted e.g. kettles, heaters, computers, photocopiers, extension leads. Electrical equipment that is fixed (wired in) is subject to different regulations and must be tested for safety every 5 years.

Most electrical safety defects can be found by visual examination, but some types of defect can only be found by testing. However, visual examination is an essential part of the process because some types of electrical safety defect can't be detected by testing alone, for example a damaged plug or cable.

A regular check of equipment (perhaps assisted by the use of a brief checklist) can be a very useful part of any electrical maintenance regime. More formal visual inspection and testing by a competent person may be required, depending upon the type of equipment and where it is used, for example a projector fixed to a ceiling.

Is Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) compulsory?

No. The law simply requires managing trustees of a church to ensure that their electrical equipment is maintained to prevent danger. It does not say how this should be done or how often. It is best to adopt a risk-based approach, which looks at the type of equipment and what it is being used for. If it is used regularly and moved a lot e.g. a floor cleaner or a kettle, testing (along with visual checks) forms an important part of an effective maintenance regime.

Do portable electrical appliances have to be tested every year?

The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 require that any electrical equipment that has the potential to cause injury is maintained in a safe condition. Unhelpfully, the Regulations do not specify what needs to be done, by whom or how frequently. This means that the inspection or testing of electrical appliances is not a legal requirement, nor is it a legal requirement to undertake this annually.

So how frequently do electrical appliances need to be tested?

The frequency of inspection and testing depends upon the type of equipment and the environment it is used in. For example, a power tool used on a construction site should be examined more frequently than a lamp in a hotel bedroom. For guidance on suggested frequencies of inspection and testing, see: [Maintaining portable and transportable electrical equipment](#).

Do records of testing need to be kept and should any appliances tested be labelled?

There is no legal requirement to label equipment that has been inspected or tested, nor is there a requirement to keep records of these activities. However, a record and / or labelling can be a useful tool for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the maintenance scheme – and to demonstrate that a scheme exists.

Does new equipment need to be tested?

New equipment should be supplied in a safe condition and not require a formal portable appliance inspection or test. However, a simple visual check is recommended to make sure the item is not damaged.

Does a qualified electrician need to be used to do portable appliance testing?

Generally, no. The person doing testing work needs to be competent to do it. In low-risk environments, a sensible (competent) person can undertake visual inspections if they know what they are looking for and why.

However, when undertaking combined inspection and testing, a greater level of knowledge and experience is needed, and the person will need:

- the right equipment to do the tests
- the ability to use this test equipment properly
- the ability to properly understand the test results

Does the Circuit have any resources to help with testing?

Yes. The Circuit has equipment that does the required tests which is straightforward to use with training. The equipment can be made available to churches to carry out the testing, subject to user training. [Ian Packham [contact details]] should be contacted about having access to the equipment.

Key Points:

- Portable electrical equipment must be maintained to prevent danger.
- For most portable electrical equipment in a low-risk environment, a portable appliance test is not needed.
- Working out what you have to do is not time consuming or complicated.
- Simply looking for signs of damage is a good way of maintaining portable electric equipment.
- If you need to carry out testing the Circuit can help.

For further information please see the Methodist Church Property Handbook section Electrical – Inspections and Testing by following the link below.

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/maintenance/>

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The Circuit Test equipment is available from Ian Packham the circuit Custodian.
i.packham@sky.com