

Where to Start Thinking About Your Church's Capacity

Scenario: A youth event is planned and promotional material sent to all neighbouring churches and high schools. A large response is expected and so it is proposed to remove the church seating from the auditorium for the evening to increase capacity.

Fear: One of the large bass guitar amplifiers emits a large "bang", catches fire and fills the auditorium with acrid smoke. Fearing more "explosions" and finding it hard to breathe, everyone tries to exit the auditorium at once. In the rush people get injured, trampled and perhaps even die.

Issue: Event organizers need to consider "With the church seating removed, how many people can we safely fit into the church auditorium?"

Start Thinking Here: The Building Code of Australia which is applied to all new public buildings recommends the following:

- Provide 0.5 sq metres per person when standing (1.0m² seated)
- Provide 1 set of double doors (1.75m in width) per 200 people
- Door must be unlocked, but also consider having them open during the event, or appoint people to open them should the need arise.
- Doors must provide unobstructed passageway to safety (ie if the doors simply lead to an enclosed courtyard filled with the overflow crowd, they would not be providing an unobstructed passageway to safety)
- Doors need to be suitably labeled with EXIT signs.

Caveat The Building Code of Australia contains many more standards and regulations pertaining to this issue, so the information presented above is intended to simply get event organisers to start considering this issue when organising large events.

To get it right – seek professional advice.