

Working in Live Performance Theatre Fact Sheet



WHAT IS MEANT BY LIVE PERFORMANCE?

While this document may apply to many theatre, television, or similar environments, its focus is on live performance including onstage, backstage, orchestra pit, fly gallery, trap rooms, quick change areas, dressing rooms, cross-over corridors, passageways (voms), entrances and booths. It also covers information about shops for props, scenery, costumes, lighting, sound, wigs, make-up, special effects, etc.

Who do the occupational health and safety laws apply to?

Almost all workplaces – including performing arts productions and events – must follow the requirements of the occupational health and safety acts and regulations in their jurisdiction. Always check with your local jurisdiction's occupational health and safety, and the worker's compensation agencies to determine what rules may apply in your situation.

Employers and workers each have duties and responsibilities towards maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. For example, employers must educate and train employees about any potential hazards, how to safely use, handle, store and dispose of hazardous products, and how to respond in emergencies. Employers must also make sure workers know how to use and handle equipment safely and properly. Workers have the responsibilities to work in compliance with the acts and regulations, to work in a safe manner as required by the employer, and to use the prescribed safety equipment.

Note that volunteers may or may not be considered "employees or workers" under occupational health and safety laws. This determination depends both on the jurisdiction (what province or territory you are in), and on if the organization is organizing their activities, providing instruction, or if the volunteer is compensated for their time (e.g., passes, certificates, food). While this distinction matters in term of any worker's compensation if an injury occurs, employers still have a duty to provide a safe and healthy work environment for all, including volunteers and guests.

Are there hazards or risks associated with live performance?

Yes. Live performance venues and production environments (shops) can have many hazards and risks. These areas involve a wide range of equipment, tools, chemicals, activities, etc.

Hazard identification and risk assessment are the key ways to address such hazards. Organizations should have a health and safety program in place.

What are some examples of the hazards in live performance theatre?

Theatre includes a number of settings, including design, set construction, props, special effects, costumes, electrics, makeup, acting, and front-of-house activities.

Set construction and deconstruction / Prop Shop / Lighting / Audio and Video

- Working at heights – including work on ladders, pits, trap doors, around openings in the floor, on or outside catwalks, in elevated storage areas, on elevated work platforms (including the open edge of the stage), etc.
- Exposure to excess noise
- Exposure to chemical and biological hazards such as batting, foam rubber, spray adhesives, dyes, paints, curing materials, plasters, moulds/fungi, etc.
- Working in confined spaces such as the orchestra pit area, elevator pits, house cove (attic) lighting areas, paint frame area, area below the main floor, etc.
- Working with rigging – working with the hardware used to lift, lower, or hold equipment on or above the stage, as well as the safety of equipment or lighting that is suspended at heights above the stage or the audience
- Use of power and hand tools such as industrial steam irons, staple guns, hammers, tack pullers, saws, scissors, hammers, needles, etc.
- Maintaining equipment, including lockout/tag out procedures
- Risk of electrical shock
- Harm from lifting and material handling
- Hazards from poor housekeeping including storage of materials and cable management (e.g., tape down, Velcro ties, etc.)
- Working with various materials including wood, metal, costume materials, crafts, paints, florals, etc.
- Hazards associated with trades such as carpentry, welding, electrician, etc.

Special effects

- Laser and strobe lights – Lights can induce seizure in some people with epilepsy or photosensitivity, cause eye damage when stared into the light, or cause skinburns if too strong or too close. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and warnings. Post signs when in use and provide appropriate training.
- Smoke, fog, haze – These effects are often created by a variety of chemicals such as glycol, mineral oil, dry ice, or pyrotechnic substances (e.g., white or smoke colour cartridges, etc.). People can react to the chemicals in air including workers and the audience. Keep exposure as low as possible, and post signs to warn others when in use. Read and follow the safety data sheets (SDS) for safe use.
- Open flame, pyrotechnics, explosives – Do not use open flame, pyrotechnics, and explosives where possible such as candles, lanterns, camp stoves, cigars, cigarettes, incense, etc. Apply for licensing and provide training when pyrotechnics are used. If approved, have stage crew stationed on either side of the stage with a fire extinguisher, keep buckets of water or sand available to extinguish smoking materials, and empty the ashtray safely. Do not smoke where not permitted. Use battery powered lights whenever possible.
- Snow, confetti, etc. – Artificial snow may be made from chemical products, paper, or plastic. Be aware that some chemicals may irritate the eyes or skin, or may be unintentionally ingested. Read and follow the SDS for safe use. Paper or plastic can be a fire hazard, as well as cause a slip or trip. Reusing material is not recommended as it may become contaminated with other debris from the floor.
- Flying and rigging performers – Flying and rigging is a hazard to both the performer and those below them. Only perform these actions with the appropriate equipment and training in fall protection.

Costumes

- Making/Constructing/Repairing – Working on costumes may involve various

equipment such as sewing machines, power scissors, cutting devices, steam irons, etc.

- Know how to use the equipment safely, follow the manufacturer's instructions, and make sure equipment is in good working condition.
- Remove equipment from service if damaged.
- Wear safety glasses and/or footwear as appropriate. Maintain good housekeeping (sweep floors, store materials, etc.)
- Wearing Costumes
 - Do not impair the breathing or hearing of the wearer.
 - Make costumes as adaptable as possible for each wearer. Trip and fall injury may occur when the wearer's vision is obstructed, by stepping on the material, when wearing over-sized shoes, etc.
 - Risk of heat stress occurs when wearing multiple layers, or when the costume retains heat and humidity.
 - Be aware that some materials are flammable and can be a greater risk when there is an open flame present
- Storing costumes – Only store in appropriate areas such as clothes hangers and shelves.

Cosmetics and theatrical makeup

- Cosmetics can contain preservatives, metals, solvents, dyes, waxes, and oils. Only use products designed for use on the skin or near the eyes. Do not use non-cosmetic products such as industrial paints. Follow instructions from the manufacturer.
- Some individuals may be allergic to components in makeup – do not use if this is the case.
- Use clean brushes, sponges, etc.
- Clean and sanitize hair pieces, skull caps, wigs, etc. when shared between users.

Special considerations

- Props that include weapons, firearms (including blanks), knives, whips, sticks, clubs, sling shots, etc. can be a hazard. Dull the edges and blunt the tips of sharp weapons. Provide training in safe use and storage of weapons.
- Firearms: Treat all firearms as though they are loaded and use blanks only (no live ammunition), store blanks and shells separately, and have a safe handoff procedure. Store all weapons in locked cabinets or rooms, and restrict access.

General

- Health and safety issues associated with fatigue and working extended hours
- Heat stress due to lack of air conditioning, stage lights, crowded rooms, etc.
- Crowd control, including limiting the number of seats, restricting additional seats, etc.
- Emergency procedures, including assisting guests during an evacuation, and maintaining clear exits and paths to the exits. Individuals may also be trained in the use of fire extinguishers or to provide first aid.

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