



Facility Safety Planning

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Summary: The differences between a 'Health & Safety Program' and a 'Safety & Security Plan' are considerable. Many facilities tend to confuse the two. 'Health & Safety' is about accident and injury prevention, where 'Safety & Security' is typically about public safety and emergency planning. Both are important, and they are developed and managed with a common goal: Keeping staff, guests, and the public in good shape.

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Closing the door after the horse is out of the barn.

Most facilities have (or should have) an **Emergency Preparedness Plan** that defines the roles of staff members in the event of several types of situations:

- Natural Disaster (flood, earthquake, avalanche)
- Weather Event (hurricane, tornado, ice / hail / snow storm)
- Security Breach (gunmen, robbery, terrorist attack)
- Building Emergency (fire, structural collapse, broken water lines, chemical spill)
- Medical Emergency (injury, accident, death)

All of these situations require close coordination with local authorities (police, fire, EMS, FEMA, etc.) and are interested in keeping the public safe in the midst of potential chaos. The outcome of many of these events can involve doctors, lawyers, building inspectors, accident investigators, and sometimes fines from federal, state, and local authorities having jurisdiction.

The best prevention is preparedness.

A Facility **Health & Safety Program** is at the other end of the process. It takes place *before* anyone gets injured or placed in harms way. With careful planning and management, involvement of the doctors, lawyers, and other expensive participants can be minimized. A Health and Safety Program is focused on the premise that *there is no such thing as an accident*. All accidents are preventable *if* the facility is well maintained and the staff is properly trained.

XSR:Die!¹

Or so goes the name of the murder-mystery play. Theatres and other Assembly Spaces are dangerous places for Audience, Performer, and Technician alike. This is why it takes a comprehensive committee to assemble and manage a Facility Safety Program. Safety programs can’t be bought (although numerous advertisements might lead you to think you can buy a theatre or convention center safety manual) and put on the shelf. They have to be developed by the very staff that will use them. Each venue is unique and plans cannot be copied from one to the next. The reason that safety plans must be developed internally is because without active participation by the very workers it will affect, there will be no “buy-in” by those that have intimate knowledge of the equipment and operations. Employees must have a stake in the program so that they won’t feel like it is being forced upon them.

Just as a Safety Program isn’t a manual filed on a shelf, it also isn’t a meeting once a year to say, “Yeah, we have a safety program.” Safety has to be continually taught to the staff and shared with the guest staff, and it has to be considered every step of the way throughout a show. Regular safety meetings to review the operational issues that are present during each show are a vital necessity. Many short safety meetings with a variety of subjects will keep your staff aware of the concepts.

¹ XSR:Die! Is actor/writer/director Kurt Kleinmann’s shorthand instructing the actor to “Cross Stage Right and Play Dead”



Take a Look at the Task at Hand

Accident prevention in a performance venue covers a wide variety of requirements and the task should usually be divided into several sub-components that are managed by the relevant staff members.

- Administrator tasks:
 - Secures funding for Safety improvements
 - Files paperwork with appropriate entities (Fire Marshall, Police, OSHA, etc.)
 - Oversees program and keeps it relevant and focused
 - Advises incoming shows regarding facility safety policies in advance of their arrival
- House Manager tasks:
 - Observes facility conditions for all areas visited by the public
 - Reports maintenance requests for those areas
 - Trains audience management staff regarding safety and accident prevention issues
 - Makes training and equipment funding requests to Administration
 - Works with guest artists vendor crews regarding facility policies
 - Coordinates House scheduling with Stage Manager & Security
 - Plans staffing requirements for each event with Administration
- Stage Manager tasks:
 - Observes facility conditions for all areas visited by guest artists, artists' crew, house crew, union crew, etc.
 - Reports maintenance requests for those areas
 - Trains backstage staff regarding safety and accident prevention issues
 - Makes training and equipment funding requests to Administration
 - Works with guest artists' stage crews regarding facility policies
 - Coordinates stage scheduling with House Manager & Security
 - Plans staffing requirements for each event with Administration
- Facility Security tasks:
 - Coordinates show scheduling with Stage and House Managers
 - Plans staffing requirements for each event with Administration
 - Trains security staff regarding safety and accident prevention issues
 - Makes training and equipment funding requests to Administration

Other players become relevant as the process of developing a facility-wide safety program goes on:

- Theatre Safety Consultant – They can bring an outside perspective to your program that is sensitive to the production arts and has experience with a wide variety of venue types and the problems and solutions that they have experienced. They can guide you and advise you on issues that could result in citations or fines by OSHA and/or the Fire Marshall so that you can get them corrected before you invite OSHA and/or the Fire Marshall to visit. A good Theatre Safety Consultant can provide you with an overview of your facility “from the street to the alley.” They will look at everything that affects the audiences' perception of the facility as they approach it, all the way to the load-in and backstage operations areas, and everything in-between, including, but not limited to, a thorough annual rigging inspection.
- Union Steward – Can help coordinate crew training and get buy-in from the workers.
- OSHA Outreach Consultant – This is *not* the enforcement arm of OSHA. This is an OSHA representative that comes to your facility *by invitation* and **helps** you to review the working conditions of your particular facility. They can advise you about any issues that fall under the OSHA Act and can guide you towards recommended solutions. One *caveat*: Any violations that are observed during their visit will probably have to be resolved / corrected within a few months, or sooner, depending upon the nature of the deficiency.



- Fire Marshall – this might be the Local and/or the State Fire Marshall, depending upon the location of your facility and the types of shows you host. Having a good working relationship with this entity is very important as they will be checking fire alarm systems, smoke vents, fire curtains, egress routes and occupancy, fire lanes, fire doors, chemical storage areas, and signing-off on events involving pyrotechnics.
- Maintenance Department – This crew is responsible for floor care which directly relates to slip-and-fall accidents; and keeping all lamps and signage up-to-date and working. Well lit travel paths for patrons and crew are essential to personnel safety.
- City or Campus Operations – These folks usually have control of street lights and traffic signals in the vicinity of the venue. It is important that traffic flows smoothly in and out of the event parking areas, and that patrons have adequate illumination to feel safe between their car / train / bus and the venue. This also affects the loading crews both before and after a show, as they are frequently having to work extended hours and may have large trucks and/or buses that require special parking and access that remains well lit after-hours. This may require the reprogramming or over-ride of lighting that is operated via energy management time clocks.
- Insurance Company – Your risk assessment manager and insurance company will be very interested to know what you are doing to reduce their exposure to claims by staff, guests, and the general public. Proactive communications may be rewarded with reduced rates.
- If your venue has a scene shop, then the shop manager / foreman should be included in any safety policy development and training.
- If your venue is part of an educational institution, then involvement by the Fire Arts Department, and/or Theatre, Dance, Band, and/or Choral instructors is advised.

A Note About Building Codes and Standards:

Building Codes (UBC, SBC, etc), Fire Codes (NFPA), Electrical Codes (NEC), Worker Safety Codes (OSHA, NIOSH), and their associated standards (ANSI) all play a part in defining the buildings we work in and the way we do that work. These are standards that have evolved over the last century and establish a *minimum* level of performance. With few exceptions, theatres, convention centers, and other arts venues are **NOT exempt** from them.

Exempt or not: *That's not the point of a safety program.* A safety program is about providing the *best* working facilities, staff, and training that is possible so that the *minimum* standards are easily achieved. Be safe and sleep well. Know that you have *exceeded the minimum requirements* and are providing the best possible show conditions for your staff *and* audience.

Additional Resources:

USITT (United States Institute for Theatre Technology) www.usitt.org
 IAAM (International Association of Assembly Managers)..... www.iaam.org
 OSHA (Occupational Health and Safety Administration)..... www.osha.gov
 NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) www.nfpa.org
 NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) www.cdc.gov/niosh