

mechanical, lighting, heating and ventilation, etc. and Rules of Management – which cover the licensee's responsibilities.

The fact that authorities in various parts of the country have differing views as to what they will or will not permit explains why, for instance, scenery that has been rendered flame-resistant by one particular method is accepted in one area but not in another. Or why there may be conflicting rules regarding the use of real flame in a production. Or in the use of laser beams for special effects! It may be illogical, it may be infuriating, but there it is. It is something to do with allowing individual local authorities to exercise their rights – but it certainly makes life hard for touring companies or for those presenting out of town try-outs!

Responsibility of the Licensee

In general, local authorities are only concerned with what takes place within their own borders and it can sometimes be extremely counter-productive to protest that since such and such was permitted in the last town visited – why not in this one? It usually behaves the "offender" (if such he be) to give in with the best grace he can muster – unless he can be absolutely sure of blinding the officials with science! The better approach is probably to get some good advice beforehand.

Experience suggests that, not until something occurs which provokes officialdom into taking some punitive action, is it always fully realised that it is the licensee who is directly responsible for any contravention of either the Theatres Act or local requirements – not just the manager, unless, of course, he happens to be both.

If the scenery fails to comply with the appropriate fire standards; if the stage basement becomes an extension of the wardrobe or, which is more likely, an unauthorised workshop; if the secondary exit from the

dressing-rooms is obstructed by storage (whether flammable or not!) or the self-closing fire doors are wedged open – it is the licensee who is liable for prosecution, not the miscreant who perpetrated the offence.

Licensees who really love their theatres (and there are one or two around who may not own to such total commitment) become deeply involved in the whole process of presenting both play and playhouse in the best possible light to the paying public while at the same time trying to ensure that those who work in the theatre are able to do so in the most satisfactory conditions. In general terms this means clean and safe conditions throughout the building.

But a licensee who endeavours to meet his obligations needs to feel that he can rely on his staff not to do silly things that can let him down.

Of course, the Health and Safety at Work Act places a responsibility on an employee as well as an employer to take "reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work . . ." But how many people take that axiom as seriously as it is meant?

How many people daily walk past things that require attention – and do nothing about it? Things like door closers not working properly (sometimes disconnected altogether); junction boxes with missing covers; ventilation grilles blocked; electrical repairs or extensions "temporarily" fixed with tape, but never properly completed; worn carpets; damaged steps and so on.

Seemingly trivial matters

Even something such as using a fire extinguisher to wedge open a door "just while we get this thing through" and, of course, leaving it wedged open can put a whole area at risk on two counts. First, in the event of fire, flames and smoke will pass straight

through what is intended to be a barrier specifically designed to prevent this from happening and second, the extinguisher, having been taken down from its bracket in its approved position may not be replaced and may well end up along the corridor or even completely out of sight and, therefore, not available at a time when it might be needed.

There are many such seemingly trivial matters in a place such as a theatre which, if they do not receive the prompt attention that they should, could in the event of an emergency, greatly increase the risk to persons and property.

It is understandable that, in these days of tight budgets and exhortations to economise, managements tend to put off what they consider to be minor repairs and replacements for as long as possible, perhaps even hoping that some of them will even go away if left long enough! But the day comes when the list of minor items becomes too long to ignore and the cost becomes the cause of much head shaking and efforts to shift it on to next year's budget (if there is a next year). And all the time there is that obligation to maintain the standards of safety required by the licensing authority, to whom the financial aspects of doing so are of no concern whatsoever.

What it all boils down to at the end of the day is that, behind the scenes, employers, staff – yes, and performers too, should all contribute what they can in the interests of good conditions and safety at work while, out front, the public, having crossed the threshold, paid up at the box-office and entered the auditorium, should have the right to feel that everything that should be done to ensure their comfort and safety in a place of entertainment, has been done.

In fact, they shouldn't have to think about it at all.

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NoTT 83

NoTT 83 was a big one. It established a norm by which future theatre conferences can expect to be judged. The NoTT 83 posters were subtitled *Nordisk TeaterTeknik Arkitektur Scenografi* and the participating countries were Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – the five nations of the Nordic Theatre Committee which maintains contacts, cooperation and exchanges in Nordic theatrical life. The event was held over a May weekend in Stockholm with the Association of Swedish Theatre Technicians as hosts. There were some 2,000 participants of whom 1,700 were paying delegates.

The conferring took place on the Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Backstage and workshop tours of the Stockholm theatres were available on the Friday. Throughout the three days there was a General Programme with discussions on virtually every area of design, technology and architecture. These general seminars were intended for non-specialists – that is, they afforded an opportunity for cross-fertilisation between