

# THEATER SAFETY



Drama is an important class for students. It builds confidence, supports team building and encourages working with others. While the performances themselves can be intimidating for students, it is the preparation before a performance and behind the scenes that can heighten safety concerns. This guide is designed to provide safety tips and recommend best practices to help each show go on without a hitch.

Drama students often participate in a wide variety of activities at multiple locations within the theater facility. Many of the items utilized in stage productions (e.g., tools, ladders, rigging, lighting, props, chemicals, etc.) require special training, regular inspection, secure storage and close supervision when in use. Many school theaters feature various nooks and crannies where students can potentially evade the watchful eyes of staff members.

All these risk factors, and more, emphasize the need for constant and diligent supervision of all students involved and in all areas of the theater facility.

### TOOLS

- Hand tools and power tools are often used to construct sets for upcoming plays. Students who are using tools should have training like woodshop class. Training should include safety instruction, PPE requirements, parts and safety quizzes and live demonstrations.
- Staff should conduct regular inspections of all tools to ensure they are in good working order and all required guards are in place. Tools should be stored in a secure cabinet to help prevent theft or damage.

### RIGGING

- Inspections of rigging should be conducted annually by a knowledgeable person and every other year by a third-party expert.
- The area around the rigging should always be kept clear and it should be locked out when not in use.
- Training for staff and students needs to be conducted before use of the rigging. Training should be conducted by a knowledgeable person or a skilled contractor. A sign stating, "Authorized Operators Only," should be hung on the wall next to the rigging equipment.

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- The fire curtain mechanism used to protect the audience from stage fires should be tested by a certified inspector annually and tested every 90 days by a knowledgeable person.
- If your stage is equipped with an orchestra pit, it should be covered when not in use or have a safety net in place to prevent falls during practice. The stage should have warning lines for actors to help prevent them from falling during shows.
- Stage lighting should be secured to the light bars and have a secondary cable attached to prevent them from falling onto someone. Burnt out lights should only be changed by staff, not students.
- If powered lifts are used, staff should be trained prior to use. Students should never be allowed to operate a powered lift.
- Staff and students must be trained on the proper use of ladders.
- Fly lofts should be secure to prevent students from entering. Students should be supervised anytime they are allowed to access the fly lofts.

## STORAGE

- Storage areas for costumes and props should be kept clean and organized. Shelves are a great way to assist with this. Store heavy items waist high, while lighter objects can be stored on lower and upper shelves. There should be clear aisles for walking to prevent trip or fall hazards.
- Store costumes and props in an area that is protected by sprinklers to help prevent fires.
- Chemicals used in this area, such as paint, solvents or stains, should be stored properly. A flammable cabinet is the best way to keep these items safe. The cabinet should be vented to the outside if possible.

## MAINTENANCE

- Curtains for the stage should be treated with fire retardant and tested annually. The curtain should have a label on the bottom stating the last time it was treated. Curtain retardant is good for approximately 10 years but can be extended if cleaned and vacuumed regularly. Any curtains not meeting NFPA 701 should be brought up to code or replaced.

## ELECTRICAL

- Electric components should be inspected regularly by a licensed electrician.
- Extension cords should be inspected to ensure there are three prongs and no fraying or exposed wires. Daisy chaining should be avoided as this can lead to potential fire hazards.

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding your theater, please do not hesitate to contact the Risk Management Department at 800-285-5461 or at [riskmanagement@sdao.com](mailto:riskmanagement@sdao.com).

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