

## SEWELL BARN THEATRE SOCIETY – POLICY PAPER 5

### Fire Safety Policy and Procedures

#### Introduction

Fire is one of the most serious hazards faced by any theatre, and the Sewell Barn Theatre Society is committed to taking all practical measures to:

- ensure awareness of those risks
- take appropriate action for their mitigation
- comply with fire safety legislation, in particular *The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005* and the *Smoke Free Law (2007)*

and thereby maintain the safety of all potentially affected.

Fire safety Policy and Procedures are considered here under three headings: precautions to avoid the occurrence of fire; preparedness and safety checks; and responses if a fire should occur. The responsibilities of specific post-holders within the Society are identified below for these topics. However, it is the responsibility of the Management Committee to ensure overall integration of fire safety arrangements, and of all Society members to be fire-aware, ensuring that their actions and those of others consistently minimize risks and maximize safety.

#### Precautions to avoid the occurrence of fire

##### ***General responsibilities for all parties***

- Smoking is not allowed within the Sewell Barn Theatre, with a notice prominently displayed on the entrance door to that effect. All Society members should be aware of that restriction (legally applicable to all public enclosed areas) and should be willing to point it out, if necessary, to audience members, volunteers and all other visitors to the building, noting that the theatre's no smoking policy also applies to vaping.
- The exception to that rule is that on stage smoking can be permissible, if an essential part of a performance and audience are notified, provided that suitable precautions are taken; see roles of Stage Manager and Health and Safety Officer below.
- The building should be kept clear of inflammable rubbish, notwithstanding that some on-site storage of set-building materials, properties and documents is necessary for the functioning of the Theatre.
- Lighting and electrical appliances such as occasional heaters in the auditorium should where practicable be turned off at the socket and unplugged when not in use. The main exceptions are: the chill cabinet in the bar area, the ice-cream freezer in the foyer; and the fridge in the dressing room.
- All electrical work carried out by members of the theatre's technical team should supervised by a competent person. Where it is necessary to involve external contractors, these must be suitably qualified.
- All fire doors should be kept closed at all times when not directly in use.

### ***Specific responsibilities of Buildings Manager***

- Carry out a Fire Safety Risk Assessment in collaboration with the Health and Safety Officer and a senior Stage Manager, to check that all precautionary arrangements relating to the building itself are in place. This Risk Assessment is to be updated on an annual basis, with involvement of external professional expertise for a more thorough fire safety inspection at least every five years<sup>1</sup>; e.g. based on *PAS79 Fire Risk Assessment - Guidance and a Recommended Methodology*, published by the British Standards Institution.
- Ensure that records and documentation pertaining to fire risk control are properly stored and easily accessible.

### ***Responsibilities of Stage Manager***

It is the Stage Manager's role to ensure that performances in the theatre do not significantly increase the risk of fire, working closely with the Set Designer/Set Builder, Director and Health and Safety Officer in identifying and controlling potential fire risks as part of the H&S assessment for each production. It is to be understood in this context that set design should minimise obstruction of the upstage exits, keeping wheelchair access either at stage right or stage left entrances/exits, preferably the former, i.e. directly to the foyer.

Specific actions (as also identified in Guidance Notes for Stage Managers) include:

- All drapes, soft furnishings, curtains and carpets should be treated with fire retardant spray. All stored curtains and fabrics have already been treated; however, new/re-treatment should be carried out for newly-acquired or borrowed items.
- Only water-based (emulsion) paint should be used on the set, since this provides a fire retardant seal on wood. Oil-based varnish, gloss paint or other highly flammable materials should not be used.
- If a cigarette/cigar, or other live flame, heat source or pyrotechnic has to be used on stage, arrangements must be approved by the Health and Safety Officer. An emergency plan must be put into writing and implemented, with the expectation that it will be based on the following guidance:
  - A member of the stage crew with a view of the flame should be positioned by an entrance with a suitable fire extinguisher (that they know how to use), or other means of extinguishing a fire should anything get out of control. The nominated member of stage crew should be satisfied that the flame is out, with no obvious smoke or glow, before leaving his/her post.
  - If the flame is to be brought off the stage, a safe means of extinguishing it should be at hand immediately adjacent to the exit in use (water or sand bucket).
  - Cigarettes to be extinguished on stage should be stubbed out in a container with water at the bottom.
  - Actors on stage with flames or heat sources should also be given guidance in safe containment of these and be made aware of their responsibilities (e.g. to ensure that cigarettes are completely out).

In addition, the Stage Manager should liaise with the Duty Front of House Manager before the start of every performance to ensure the exits currently available for evacuation of the building are clearly understood.

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<sup>1</sup> A professional Fire Safety Inspection of the Sewell Barn Theatre was carried out by Icen Fire Safety in March 2019, report IFS\_FRA\_INIT\_2019\_001

### ***Responsibilities of Health and Safety Officer***

The Health and Safety Officer has overall responsibility for fire safety arrangements, and for identifying and controlling fire hazards when approving the risk assessment for each production, working in collaboration with the Set Designer/Set Builder, Stage Manager and Director.

### **Preparedness and safety checks**

Fire extinguishers will be maintained and checked under contract (currently awarded to First Class Fire Protection) every year. Fire detection systems and associated alarms are serviced annually, at no cost to us, by contractors acting for the Sewell Park Academy as part of their tests on alarms in the school buildings, and the Academy is expected to supply us with a copy of the service certificate. Until relatively recently an alarm going off in the theatre also sounded in the school and *vice versa*; however, the theatre's alarm system has now been separated, so that is no longer the case..

### ***Responsibilities of Building Manager***

The Building Manager will work closely with Sewell Park Academy and Norfolk County Council to:

- Maintain fire escapes and routes that are clearly marked and unobstructed.
- Ensure that the building has appropriate fire detection and abatement equipment (with testing arrangements as detailed above).
- Ensure that the emergency lighting system is working correctly.

### ***Responsibilities of Front of House Stewards***

Before every public performance, a competent Front of House Steward will carry out an inspection of the theatre to ensure that all fire safety arrangements are in place and in good order. That inspection is based on a checklist (with copy to be kept in the records) including the following items for individual inspection, as detailed in the *Front of House Policy and Procedures*:

- Both doors to the main entrance and four additional fire escape routes (three downstairs, one upstairs) are accessible, checking that fire doors can be easily opened.
- All four Emergency Exit signs are illuminated.
- Ten fire extinguishers are in place (five upstairs, five downstairs).
- Corridors and other areas that are fire escape routes are free of obstruction.

If there are checklist issues relating to fire safety (or other concerns), the Duty Front of House Manager and/or the Stage Manager need to be informed, so that either immediate remedial action can be carried out or additional precautions taken.

Stewards should also ensure that they sit in the correct vantage points in the auditorium, have working torches with them at all times, and are particularly aware of any trip hazards on escape routes.

### ***Responsibilities of Health & Safety Officer***

The Health and Safety Officer will work closely with the post-holders identified above, providing an overview role. In addition, that individual will:

- Arrange for a Fire Drill Procedure to be carried out periodically, to involve other Society members (it is not expected that a practice evacuation will be carried out during a public performance).
- Ensure that information on Fire Drill Procedure is prepared and displayed near to other Health and Safety information on the noticeboard. The evacuation assembly point is on the far side

of the school car park, on a grassed area near the roadside hedge (marked with Emergency Assembly sign).

- Ensure stewards and other volunteers receive appropriate training on fire procedures that they need to follow.

### **Responses if a fire should occur**

In the event of a fire, the Stage Manager, Front of House Stewards, Health and Safety Officer (if available) and other Management Committee members who might be in the building will work together on the following responses:

- Set off the fire alarm (if the alarm is not already ringing), using one of the break-glass points next to the fire exits, and either directly dial 999 to call the fire brigade or ask someone else to make that call. There is a phone behind the bar (Norwich 418803) or a mobile phone can be used. The fire alarm should alert the fire brigade automatically. Nevertheless, it is still best to call them anyway.
- The person calling the fire brigade should give the location clearly: Sewell Barn Theatre at the Sewell Park Academy on Constitution Hill, Norwich NR3 4BB and the What3Words location, moving.gear.clown, making sure that the emergency service has repeated the address.
- Do not tackle a fire unless you know what you are doing, and are able to maintain a clear exit route.
- During public performances, it is the Stage Manager's responsibility to halt the show and inform the Stewards of the direction(s) where they are to evacuate the audience (away from the location of the fire). The audience should be addressed clearly and calmly; announcements can be made over the PA system. The Stewards are then responsible for evacuating the audience, following the Fire Drill Procedure. Fire doors that are not used for the evacuation should be kept closed.
- The Stage Manager is responsible for ensuring that the actors, technical team and bar volunteers leave the building safely, following the Fire Drill Procedure, and joining the audience at the evacuation assembly point on the far side of the car park, staying there until a head count has taken place.
- The Stage Manager is responsible for liaising with the fire crew, ensuring that no-one returns to the building unless given permission to do so by the fire crew.

As the Sewell Barn Theatre's fire alarm is linked to the school, if it goes off it does not necessarily mean that there is a fire in the theatre. However, on hearing the alarm, a full evacuation should be carried out even if there is no immediate evidence of a fire.

#### **Policy review**

The policy will be reviewed every three years by the Policies Subcommittee and any significant amendments will be referred to the Management Committee for ratification. It may also be reviewed in response to changes in relevant legislation, good practice, or in response to an identified failing in its effectiveness.

**Policy initially drafted and adopted:** December 2018

**Policy last reviewed:** October 2023

**Next review due:** Autumn 2026.