

Let me get the joke out of the way first of all. How many Health and Safety Inspectors does it take to screw in a light bulb? One. One to hold the bulb and the rest of the world to revolve around him.

It does seem that way sometimes. Those responsible for Health and Safety being the tin God without whose approval no activity may take place. For those of you familiar with television's 'On the Buses' the Health and Safety inspector could be the new Blakey. 'I'll get you Butler'.

But this 'jobs worth' image, much loved by the Daily Mail is not really true in the real world in which we live. Health and Safety issues are no longer simply the nanny state laying down bureaucratic laws to curtail the freedom of the

working man. Legislation and guidance are now part of the working culture in our society.

The theatre industry reflects this culture well. It could be argued that we always did. The fact that we work in the dark on a platform without safety barriers, on a surface that has trap doors, toiling under scenery that could be dropped in at a moments notice and with other articles moving in from the wings means that you think twice before going onstage in the first place. However nowadays we don't think twice. We think once, and that is before we do anything. And that thought process is called a risk assessment.

That process is something which managements and unions both agree on. We are lucky in this country that unions and management agree that

safety is non negotiable. In other parts of the world performers and technicians are still fighting to have that attitude. **Safety is non negotiable.** Which brings me neatly to the Theatre Safety Committee.

The Theatre Safety Committee or TSC has been in existence for over ten years now. I won't bore you with its pre-history or history but suffice it to say that it has changed as it has grown. And, in many ways, the growth of the TSC reflects how the culture of Health and Safety has established itself in this country.

Ten years ago, people in this industry were still shaking their heads and commenting on the nanny state interfering in their working methods. That attitude has, I believe, changed to where the

observation of Health and Safety regulations and guidelines has now become just part of everyday working practice. And that is of course, best practice.

The TSC has recognised that this best practice has to be accepted across the theatre industry whether union, management, association, paid or non paid.

And, to that end, the membership of the TSC reflects practitioners across the industry. For the managements we have the Society of London Theatres, the Theatrical Management Association and the Independent Theatre Council.

Representing the unions are the Musicians Union, Bectu and Actors Equity. Associations who sit on the committee are the ABTT, the Stage

Management association and IEAM – the Institute of Entertainment and Arts Management.

Also on board is the central Council of Amateur Theatres who also represent the National Operatic and Dramatic Association or NODA.

They are there in recognition that in technical terms the line between the paid and the non paid is nowadays very blurred. Professional houses take in amateurs and amateurs take in professional companies. It is a good idea that the same hymn sheet is used by both.

The Committee meets four times a year over lunchtime on a Friday. I am always gratified that attendance is high especially as it involves a commitment from very busy people to not only

attend but read the plethora of back up papers beforehand.

The group's remit is to look at how safe working practice is being carried out. We are both reactive and pro-active. We look at new legislation, recent incidents and monitor work being carried out by other groups. We discuss areas of concern that have been raised and may decide that guidance notes might be needed to deal with a potential problem. Every member has a chance to participate in the discussion or bring something new to the table. The meeting is consensual, no votes are usual taken and the negotiation word is taboo.

The TSC is there to help the industry not to censure it or to stop it playing to its strength. Any

live performance is dangerous in as much as that when we create drama there must be an element of the unknown about it. If it were not so audiences would not want to come and see the spectacle. The TSC is there to promote the spectacle not to rein it in. We are about making the art of the possible, practical.

It is worth pointing out that the Committee operates without funds. The secretarial work is absorbed by SOLTTMA for which we are very grateful. Very occasionally we seek funds for a one off task but that is rare.

The TSC has relationships with other bodies on a national level which we shall go into in a moment. Now, I shall ask Louise Norman, Legal Officer at SOLTTMA to describe some of the work we have

done over the last years and what we are looking
at now.