

## **PROTECTION FOR STUDENTS IN THE PERFORMING ARTS**

**By Dr. Randall W. A. Davidson**

**“The president’s most solemn obligation is protecting the American people.” New Times quote from the White House, December 18, 2003.**

**Accepting this statement at face value, I therefore believe and affirm that the health and safety of students in the performing arts, especially in public educational institutions, but not limited to the public sector, must be included in this solemn obligation of protection. From the elementary school to the university, all students are to be protected under this solemn obligation. The chilling factor is that students are not protected, nor are audiences and instructors in too many cases.**

### **Many Performing Arts Facilities and Spaces Are Unprotected**

**Such is not the case in the majority of the educational performing arts facilities and spaces in the United States, in my opinion. I do not believe there is a single state in this country that does not have many of these dangerous and hazardous performing spaces. In too many educational institutions, at all levels, the performing arts facilities, spaces, and equipment are dangerous and hazardous, and have remained in that condition for as many as thirty to forty years. We have inspected some that are more than sixty years in the state of disrepair.**

### **Deferred Maintenance Is the Norm: An Imminent Danger and Hazard to All**

**Many of the facilities are in a condition known as “deferred maintenance” attached to their order for repair and renovation. What this means in real terms is the physical buildings and spaces, along with much of the equipment are not only in a state of disrepair but much of the equipment should be replaced because it is so hazardous. These facilities and the equipment in them present a clear and imminent danger to the students and the instructors who work and perform in them.**

### **Major Violations of Standards of Care and Codes**

**University, College, and Secondary (Middle, Junior, and Senior High) Educational Systems throughout the United States have many performing arts spaces that should be shuttered until they are brought up to the Standard of Care and meet all Code (IAQ [Indoor Air Quality], Electrical, Plumbing, Environmental, Security, ADA, Storage, Fire Protection, Pyrotechnical, Welding, Laser, ANSI [American National Standard Institute] and Building) Standards.**

### **New Facilities Are Not Immune to Dangerous and Hazardous Conditions**

**There are some new performing arts facilities which also fail in some areas of protection. We have also inspected some of these and can attest to their unsafe conditions. Perhaps this is due to a shortage of money, lack of qualified, competent, and professional builders, designers, improper specifications, and non-professional equipment installers.**

### **Shocking Realities and Attitudes of Authorities**

**All of these conditions are way beyond unfortunate, but they are true and they do exist all over the country. The solemn obligation to protect the students at all levels of education in the performing arts has been, in my opinion, blatantly violated by too many individuals, and public and private entities, districts, and Boards of Education and Directors.**

### **Common Lists of Violations of Codes and Standards Available**

**We can readily supply dozens of pages of violations of the Codes and Standards which we have catalogued over the years, and continue to do so year and after year. In point of fact, these have been copied by many institutions and associations and individuals in the performing arts over the years, so they are common knowledge. We have supplied these at professional workshop, seminars, international professional conferences, and over the internet for over many, many years.**

### **Why These Horrendous, Hazardous and Dangerous Conditions ?**

- **Lack of available funds for the Arts and their facilities and equipment.**
- **Priorities in other areas. Some of these we believe are specious.**
- **Administrative attitudes towards the Arts as not being as visible a symbol for the institution as other activities which are supported.**
- **A cosmetic approach to “fix up” facilities piecemeal.**
- **A high level of ignorance on the part of facility directors, Boards, Councils, and administrators as to the real needs of a safe and healthy environment for the performing arts facility.**
- **Lack of knowledge on the part of many AHJ’s as to the real needs and protections required for a healthy and safety performing arts environment, i.e. Codes, Standards, etc.**
- **A major reticence on the parts of instructors and chairpersons to ask for more assistance and funds after they have been turned down so many times.**
- **Fear of loss of employment by instructors and some administrators if they keep bringing up the requests for new equipment, facilities, especially as performing arts equipment is usually expensive.**
- **A pervasive attitude on the part of so many instructors in the performing arts at all levels of education that they must “make do and be creative” or the performing arts program, activity or space will be closed.**

- **Decision making as to the specifying and purchase of equipment and other physical needs by individuals in the educational system who do not have a truly professional knowledge or experience as to what is needed to operate a safe and healthy performing arts program and space.**
- **Lack of professional training, skills, competency and knowledge in the performing arts of so many individuals who are put in charge of performing arts programs at all levels of education. This condition exists in so many situations in this country, backed by budgetary considerations and a lack of a true risk management program in education.**
- **An extremely high level of ignorance of Codes and Standards that apply to the performing arts by administrators, facility directors, and instructors.**
- **A near totally “hands-off” policy, lack of knowledge and experience on the part of major national and international institutions who insure and provide liability coverage for the educational performing arts programs and facilities.**
- **A lack of a professional risk management program of risk assessments, and active preventive maintenance programs as a normal and mandated policy of each educational entity.**
- **A tentative, half-hearted attempt on the part of educational and professional associations in the performing arts to assert a common and aggressive mandate to press for stronger Codes and Standards that intimately impact the educational performing arts at all levels.**
- **An severe and jaundiced administrative reaction to those individuals who continue to strongly request change of policies, safer and health working environments, and protection of students, audiences and instructors.**
- **The appointment of individuals who will “tow the administrative line” of “do not rock the boat” to chair educational performing arts departments at all levels.**
- **A lack of quality control and professional evaluation of products of all types, especially chemicals that are specified and purchased for educational performing arts activities.**
- **A very scary and ominous fact is that there are thousands of individuals who are administrators and/or instructors at all levels, who truly believe they are skilled, knowledgeable, competent and know the Codes and Standards that apply to the educational performing arts, and what is more believe their facilities and equipment are all right.**

### **Exceptions Are Few and Far Between**

**Indeed, there is a limited number of individuals in the educational performing arts who are professional in most ways. And there are some, but few, educational performing arts facilities that meet many Health and Safety Codes and Standards. However, this number is quite limited.**