



Northwestern University

Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz
Center for the Performing Arts

Fall Protection
Hazard Control Policies
Last Updated: 9/4/2023

Theatrical Fall Hazard Control Policies

Venue: Wirtz Center

Site Supervisor: Shannon Perry

Affected Parties:

Shop Personnel (Scenic, Props, Paint, Electrics, Costume)

Wirtz Center Staff

Performers

Directors/Designers

Stage Management/Show Crews

Outside Visitors

Overview:

The following items have been identified as potential fall hazard risks in the theaters and shop spaces of the Wirtz Center:

- Louis Theater front-of-stage
- Holes in any stage
- Scenic staircases/raised platforms
- Scaffolding
- Portable ladders

This document serves as an acknowledgement of the inherent risks of these items and outlines our policies to mitigate these risks. This document does not address the fall hazards associated with overhead/fly system work, which can be found elsewhere in our fall protection paperwork.

Louis Theater Front-of-Stage

Risks

- The front of stage is currently always without a handrail or barrier indicating the edge of the stage. This lack of fall protection relies on individuals' awareness of the edge of the stage, and invites disaster/serious injury during Wirtz operating hours.
- During dress/tech rehearsals and performances, when a handrail is not present, performers will be at risk of falling off the stage.
- Individuals such as directors, stage management, and designers are often traveling from house level to stage level. This is easily done when a staircase is put in place, but becomes a fall hazard when the staircase is removed. Individuals may forget that the staircases have been removed, which could lead to serious injury.

Controls

Site Supervisor:

- The fire curtain must be lowered after each work and show call to act as a barrier to the edge of the stage. Stage crews must be trained on proper deployment of the fire curtain.
- An announcement will be made to affected parties when the front of stage staircases have been removed.
- An email announcement will be sent out to all affected parties when the front of stage staircases have been removed.
- Staircases should only be removed on the day before performances begin, so there should be no need to travel between levels.

Stage Management:

- Performers on stage can be considered protected from a fall during performance if their Performer Blocking is carefully planned and rehearsed so that they never come so close to the stage edge that a misstep will cause them to fall



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- Glow tape or lights will be used to indicate the edge of the stage even under dim stage lighting conditions

Holes in Stages:

Risks

- Affected parties can trip or step into holes left open on stage.

Controls

Shop Personnel:

- While working in the hole, place guardrails 4 feet from the perimeter of the hole to keep passerby away from the hole
- When not working in the hole, ensure that it is either guarded by a cover thick enough to support twice a person's weight, or guardrails that keep passerby from coming near

Site Supervisor:

- Signage should be posted indicating that there is an open hole in the stage

Scenic Staircases/Raised Platforms:

Risks

- Affected parties could fall from the side of the staircase or raised platform

Controls

Site Supervisor:

- In accordance with university policies, any staircase having at least 3 treads and at least 4 risers must be equipped with stair rail systems and handrails
- Raised platforms that are 4 feet above stage level must be equipped with handrails
- Handrails for either structure must be built according to specifications from ANSI E1.46 2016, 1910.23(e)

Scaffolds

Risks

- Affected parties could fall from the sides of scaffolding
- Affected parties could drop tools from the sides of scaffolding

Controls

Site Supervisor:

- Scaffolds must have fall protection systems such as guardrails, safety gates, or personal fall protection systems

Shop Personnel:

- No scaffold shall be erected, moved, dismantled, or altered except under the supervision of a competent person
- Scaffolds shall not be altered or moved horizontally while they are in use
- If the scaffold has locking casters, they should be locked while the scaffold is in use
- If working more than 10' from the ground, tools in use overhead must be connected via lanyard to either the user or the scaffold itself

Portable Ladders

Risks

- Affected parties could fall from the sides of a ladder due to tipping, improper ladder setup, improper body positioning, etc
- Improper ladder setup while on scenery could present fall risks



Controls

Shop Personnel:

- Inspect portable ladders before each use
- Always maintain three points of contact with the ladder rungs
- Follow all guidelines established in EHS's online training module for portable ladder safety
- Do not set up your ladder so that your last step would take you off the side of a platform or the edge of the stage

Site Supervisor:

- Conduct periodic inspections of the condition of all ladders