
FOR INFORMATION

Electrocution Risks at Musical Events

I want to bring your attention to a recently investigated fatal incident.

The basic circumstances appeared to be, that a guitarist was electrocuted when a voltage of approximately 230 volts ac appeared between the strings of his guitar, and an amplifier lead he was holding.

The establishment was properly licensed under the current licensing regime, but as set out in the guidance, prescriptive licensing conditions that could be achieved by other legislation were not applied. In summary this appears to have resulted in the removal of what might otherwise have been a normal condition to provide residual current device (RCD) protection, because of the assumption that this could/would instead be achieved via legislation such as Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (HSWA) Section 2 and/or 3, or Electricity at Work (EAWR) 89 Regulation 4(1).

The potential problems with the approach described above are however:

- (a) that the fixed electrical installation within the entertainment premises (eg the electricity supplies to 13 A socket outlets that would be used by the entertainers) can be entirely sound (ie suitably constructed, suitably maintained and hence entirely safe to use) without the provision of RCD protection
- (b) that the entertainers are most unlikely to provide their own RCD protection - and may also provide unsuitably constructed or inadequately maintained electrical equipment
- (c) that it is most unlikely that duty holders such as the average public house landlord would be sufficiently knowledgeable, or proactive to ensure that the entertainers electrical equipment was safe to use.

For many years Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has advised that electricity supplies for entertainer's equipment should be protected by 30 mA RCDs, as a reasonably practicable means of providing supplemental protection against the risk of severe electric shock or electrocution (death). 'Supplemental' in this case is intended to confirm that an RCD must never be relied upon as a primary or sole means of protection against severe electric shock or electrocution (because the entertainers equipment must of course still be suitably constructed and maintained) but that such protection should always be provided as an additional (and often extremely effective) control measure.

There is health and safety guidance that recommends the use of RCD protection that would be relevant to these circumstances ie Guide to Health, Safety and Welfare at Pop Concerts and similar events, published 1993, by HSC Home Office and Scottish Office, and other relevant guidance eg Electrical Safety for Entertainers (INDG247), Electrical Safety at Places of Entertainment (GS50), and the Event Safety Guide (HSG195).

I would therefore, very strongly recommend that, where appropriate, consideration should be given to including a licence condition, requiring the provision of RCD protection of electricity supplies to entertainers equipment, including microphones, as described in H&S guidance, when licensing relevant premises and events. This would of course be achieved by recommending, as a responsible authority, that when there is an application for these types of premises, you may wish to make representation to the effect that this condition should be attached to the licence.

Please refer this note onto your Licensing Section for information if it is not a matter within your specific area of responsibility.

Allan Davies,
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