



Guidance on Smoking on Stage

South London Theatre
Version 1.0

Last updated July 2026

1. Purpose

This guidance sets out the requirements for the use of smoking or the appearance of smoking during rehearsals and performances at South London Theatre. It is intended to ensure compliance with UK smoke-free legislation while protecting performers, volunteers, staff, audiences and the venue.

2. Scope

This guidance applies to:

- All productions staged by SLT.
- All performers, directors, stage management, technicians and volunteers.
- All rehearsal venues and performance venues.

3. Legal Background

Under the Health Act 2006, enclosed public places and workplaces are generally required to be smoke-free. Amateur theatres are workplaces for volunteers and performers as well as public venues.

Current legislation provides a limited exemption (or legal defence) where smoking by a performer is genuinely required to preserve the artistic integrity of a performance. This should not be interpreted as a general permission to smoke on stage.

SLT will therefore only consider the use of real smoking where it is demonstrably necessary and where all legal, health and safety and venue requirements have been satisfied.

4. Policy

SLT's default position is:

- No real tobacco smoking during rehearsals or performances.



- Directors should first consider non-smoking alternatives.
- Real smoking will only be considered in exceptional circumstances following a formal risk assessment and approval process.

5. Alternatives

Before approving real smoking, the production team should consider alternatives including:

- Acting the smoking without any lit product.
- Herbal or theatrical prop cigarettes (subject to venue approval and fire risk assessment).
- Electronic stage effects that create the appearance of smoke.
- Lighting, sound and performance techniques.
- Script adaptation where appropriate.

Many productions can achieve the intended dramatic effect without exposing performers or audiences to smoke.

6. Approval Process

Any proposal to use smoking on stage must be submitted to the Theatre Committee before rehearsals begin.

The proposal should include:

- Why smoking is artistically essential.
- Why alternatives are unsuitable.
- The type of product proposed.
- Duration and frequency of smoking.
- Location within the performance.
- Fire risk assessment.
- Health risk assessment.
- Building Manager approval.

Final approval rests with the Commercial Director in consultation with the Building Manager.

7. Health and Safety Considerations

The production team must consider:

- Exposure of performers to second-hand smoke.
- Audience exposure.
- Asthma or respiratory conditions.
- Allergies or sensitivities.



- Ventilation.
- Children or vulnerable adults involved in the production.
- Cleaning requirements following performances.

No person should be required to smoke as a condition of participation.

8. Fire Safety

Smoking materials present a significant fire hazard.

Where smoking is approved:

- Suitable metal ash receptacles must be provided.
- A responsible person must supervise disposal.
- Smoking materials must never be left unattended.
- Combustible scenery, costumes and props must be considered.
- Fire extinguishers must remain readily available.
- The cigarette is extinguished immediately after leaving the performance area
- The venue's fire procedures must be followed at all times.

9. Communication

Where a production includes smoking or simulated smoking, audiences should be informed in advance through:

- Marketing material where appropriate.
- Website or ticket information.
- Front-of-house notices.
- Programme content warnings.

Suggested wording:

"This production contains scenes depicting smoking and may include simulated or theatrical smoking effects."

If real smoking has been approved, the wording should make this clear.

10. Insurance

The Commercial Director should confirm that:

- Public liability insurance remains valid.
- The venue's insurance conditions are met.
- Any additional insurer requirements have been satisfied.



11. Responsibilities

Show Directors

- Minimise the need for smoking.
- Consider suitable alternatives.
- Complete the approval process.

Stage Manager

- Ensure approved procedures are followed.
- Monitor safe disposal.
- Report any incidents.

Performers

- Follow all safety instructions.
- Use only approved smoking materials.
- Report any health concerns immediately.

Theatre Committee

- Review requests.
- Ensure appropriate risk assessments are completed.
- Maintain this guidance.

12. Approval from London Borough of Lambeth

SLT recognises that, while UK legislation provides an artistic exemption permitting smoking in limited theatrical circumstances, local authority expectations and venue requirements may impose additional conditions.

Licensing Position

Our current understanding is that Lambeth Council would ordinarily expect a premises licence to be varied before permitting real smoking as part of a theatrical performance.

The Council provides a process for applying for a Minor Variation to a Premises Licence (currently £89).

However, SLT does not currently require a premises licence for theatrical performances because our productions normally:



- take place between 08:00 and 23:00; and
- are performed to audiences of fewer than 500 people.

Accordingly, we do not hold a premises licence that could be varied. This creates some uncertainty as to the appropriate process for obtaining any necessary approval for smoking on stage.

Before any proposal involving real smoking is approved, the Production Manager or Committee should contact Lambeth Council's Licensing Team to obtain written advice on whether any permission, notification or other process is required.

SLT Approval Requirements

If the Theatre Committee is asked to approve real smoking, the production must provide:

- a written statement explaining why real smoking is essential to the artistic integrity of the production;
- an explanation of why non-smoking alternatives are unsuitable;
- a production-specific risk assessment covering fire safety, health and audience exposure;
- written confirmation from the Building Manager that smoking would be permitted;
- written advice or confirmation from Lambeth Council where appropriate; and
- confirmation that SLT's insurers have no objection.

Performer Acceptance

Any performer who is proposed to smoke on stage should declare to a person on Theatre Committee and independent of the production:

1. they are an existing smoker and are not being encouraged to begin smoking for the production;
2. they have not been placed under any pressure or coercion to smoke on stage;
3. they understand the health risks associated with smoking; and
4. they understand that, if the artistic exemption were found not to apply or smoke-free legislation were breached, enforcement action could potentially be taken against those responsible under the relevant legislation.

Audience Information

Where smoking has been approved, audiences should be informed in advance that the production contains real tobacco smoking so that individuals with respiratory conditions or smoke sensitivities can make an informed decision about attending.

13. SLT Position



SLT considers the use of real tobacco to be a very exceptional measure.

Given the uncertainty surrounding local licensing expectations in Lambeth, SLT's default position remains that theatrical alternatives, including herbal cigarettes or simulated smoking effects, should be used wherever they can achieve the required dramatic effect.

Real tobacco smoking should only be authorised where the Committee is satisfied that:

- the artistic exemption clearly applies;
- all legal and licensing issues have been addressed;
- the risks have been reduced so far as is reasonably practicable; and
- no suitable alternative exists.

13. Review

This guidance will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if legislation or venue requirements change.

Key Principle

SLT recognises that smoking may occasionally form part of a dramatic performance. However, the health and safety of performers, volunteers, audiences and venue staff takes precedence. The use of real tobacco should always be the option of last resort, with suitable theatrical alternatives preferred wherever reasonably practicable. Any production wishing to use cigarettes will need to comply with the requirements set out in this document.