

Ensuring Your Theater/Stage Curtains are NFPA 701 Compliant

NFPA 701 is the standard that is accepted throughout the US to certify stage drapery for fire retardancy. The first thing to determine is whether there are any existing flame proof certification labels or tags affixed to the drapes and what they say about the material. Do they list the manufacturer of the drape? Do they list what type of textile? What category of fire retardancy do they fall under? Stage drapes generally fall into two categories:

Fire Retardant (FR), meaning the textile has been treated with a flame proofing chemical and that the material would be fully combustible without the treatment. This treatment needs to be re-applied generally every one to five years depending on the treatment process and the material (cotton, synthetic, polyester, etc.).

Inherently Fire Retardant (IFR), meaning the textile itself is non-combustible and the drape material does not require any additional treatment for the life of the material.

Drapes can be sent out to be re-treated to a couple of facilities that specialize in servicing theatrical drapery. It is a very specific treatment process. The companies listed below are known to come to the school, take the drapes down, pack them for shipping in laundry hampers, send them out to be treated, and re-install them. This is also an opportune time for the curtain track rigging and stage rigging in general to have a safety inspection, which can be done by these companies.

In order to put quotes together for this process, the companies need to know:

- Are the drapes labelled/tagged? If yes, what do the labels say?
- What are the drape dimensions?
- What type of material they are made from?
- The general age and condition of the drapes
- How the drapes are sewn. Do they have pleats or folds, are they just flat, do they have any special edging or decorative features?
- Other Considerations Include: Labor to remove and re-install the drapes, which will depend on how they are rigged/hung and any other worker access needs. Will ladders or scaffold be required? Can the drapes just be lowered to the floor using an existing stage rigging system, etc.

Then there is the question of whether to send drapes out to be treated, or to have them replaced with new drapes that are IFR and will never need to be treated again. If the drapes are one-of-a kind, have historic significance, or are otherwise deemed too valuable to replace, then re-treating can be reasonably advised. If the drapes do not have any of these characteristics, and are already fairly old, it can be an excellent long term strategy (compliance- and future cost-wise) to replace them with drapes that will never need to be re-treated/certified. These companies can also help with that option and quote on brand new drapes made to order.

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