

## FLAME RETARDANCY REGULATIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Sew What? certifies its custom stage curtains and digitally printed backdrops as flame retardant according to [specific standards and regulations in the United States](#). All flame retardant fabrics are certified to NFPA 701, the national standard, and most are also certified according to [California's Title 19 regulation](#) as well as New York City requirements.

However, as we work so frequently with the music touring industry, we are frequently asked whether our fabrics meet flame retardancy standards in other countries. This question is, understandably, quite difficult to answer. The first question is, what countries will the tour visit? Just as there are a variety of flame retardancy standards in the United States, there are a variety of standards worldwide.

Consider Australia. In Australia, flame retardancy of hanging fabric (drapes and curtains) is covered by two standards of the Australian Building Code. Standard AS 1530.3 covers curtains and drapes that are actually hung (such as on curtain track or a pipe batten). If a curtain or drape is attached to the wall (such as stapled to the wall), it is considered a wall fixture and would be covered by ISO 9705.

Regardless of whether a curtain or drape is certified flame retardant in another country (such as the United States), in order to be used in Australia, it must be tested to the Australian standard by a laboratory that has been accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities of Australia (NATA). There are a couple of ways that this can be done. The first option is to contract directly with a testing laboratory (such as AWTA) for testing. The last I heard, the cost for this averaged around \$750 US (\$720 AUS) per fabric. A total of 10 samples, each 24" x 18", are required. The average turnaround is two weeks, with results faxed and mailed to the customer.

The second option is to contract with a flameproofing company in Australia. If it is a type of fabric that they have previously treated and had tested, the flameproofing company may already have lab test results on file; otherwise they will treat the sample(s) and arrange for lab testing. The cost of using a flameproofing company will vary, depending on services rendered, but obviously, if the flameproofing company has to send the samples to a testing lab, the cost will include the lab test fees plus the fees from the flameproofing company. The process may also be a little different if the fabric is inherently / permanently flame retardant; if a chemical flame retardant treatment has not been used, I am not sure if a flameproofing company (which specializes in topical treatment) can assist or if you would need to go directly to the lab for testing.

And this is just one country. In Europe alone, I can think of three different flame retardancy standards – British, German, and French. For Europe, we can make informed suggestions on a few fabrics, based on testing performed by U.S. laboratories according to U.K., German or French standards. However, very few fabrics have been tested in the U.S. for European standards (such testing can be cost prohibitive). And even with the fabrics that have been tested, those test results typically are not accepted by European venues, as the venues typically want to see that a fabric has been tested by a laboratory in the specific country. The U.K. wants to see test results from a U.K. laboratory, Germany wants to see German lab tests, and so on.

And that is just one region. Think of the many international locations that a music tour might visit – Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa – the list is endless. It is, for all intents and purposes, impossible for Sew What? (or any other U.S. drapery provider) to know if a fabric will meet flame retardancy standards in every international concert location. So, in many cases, the solution is to provide fabric samples to the tour in advance. This allows the tour's production team to work with local companies in all the countries to which it will visit, to facilitate FR testing and certification for each country in advance. Unfortunately, this can be a time-consuming (and, I imagine, a costly) process. Still, I suppose it beats purchasing a whole new set of custom stage curtains in each country on the tour!