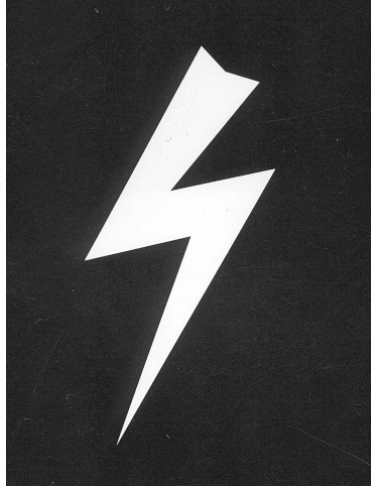




## GUIDANCE NOTE

# PORTABLE APPLIANCE TESTING AT RECEIVING VENUES



**The safety of all electrical equipment used in theatre is of vital importance.**

Detailed advice and guidance on electrical safety and the actual process of Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) is available in *Advice on Electrical Safety and Portable Appliance Testing*, published by the ABTT, and from a number of other publications.

However, problems have sometimes arisen, particularly in smaller touring venues, with the requirement to provide a PAT certificate before putting electrical equipment into use.

The ABTT is often asked the following sort of question:

*"My venue has a blanket 'everything must be tested and labelled' PAT policy. What do I do if the equipment arriving for tonight's show is not tested or is not labelled? I might lose my job if I cause the show to be cancelled but I might also lose my job if I don't uphold our safety policy."*

In this Guidance Note we offer some advice on ways of avoiding this situation, or at least of dealing with it effectively.

**Firstly, let's deal with a few common misconceptions ...**

***“PAT's a legal requirement”*** – not quite. The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 require that portable and transportable equipment be maintained so far as is reasonably practicable in a safe condition. However, the Regulations do not specify how this is to be achieved. This means that, although the currently recommended portable appliance testing techniques, record keeping and test frequencies are considered to be best practice for ensuring electrical equipment is properly maintained, they are not 'legal requirements'.

***“A test certificate or label proves the equipment is safe”*** – no. A test certificate or a label is similar to a vehicle MOT; it only shows that, at the time of the inspection and test, the equipment passed. Any number of things could have happened to the equipment since that time, which could mean that it would no longer be safe.

***“Either way, I'll lose my job”*** – not legally. Although your employers might threaten various disciplinary measures, it is difficult to see how in practice they could discipline or dismiss you solely for applying, in good faith, part of the company's safety policy.

**Next, what preparation should you make?**

- If possible discuss electrical safety issues with your employers. Remember they are entitled to insist on a blanket PAT policy if they wish.
- Make sure that your job description details your responsibility in respect of PAT.
- Make sure you know what the contract with the visiting company says regarding PAT.
- Make sure that you are authorised, trained, and competent to enforce as necessary the PAT policy adopted by your venue
- Have an up-to-date written copy of your venue's PAT policy to hand at all times.
- Make sure you know which circuits, if any, have built-in residual current devices (RCD) protection.
- Equip your department with several portable RCDs. They won't cure a problem but they might reduce the risk sufficiently to allow a show to go ahead.
- Know what to do if you cannot resolve the problem.

**Regular dialogue between management and staff and good preparation before each event will help to reduce the likelihood of problems occurring.**

- Discuss the implementation of the PAT policy fully with your management to ensure that they understand from the outset:
  - the amount of time and money which may be involved;
  - the possible disruption to shows if the policy is applied rigorously;
  - why access to management back-up at all times is needed;
  - the need to include the PAT policy in the contract with the visiting company.
- Consider whether to offer in-house PAT to visiting companies, if there is suitable equipment and competent personnel are available.
- Try to ensure that the contract with the visiting company makes it clear that the visiting company acknowledges its responsibility to ensure that all the electrical equipment brought in by the visiting company is properly maintained and appropriately tested for safety and that any certificates required under the venue's PAT policy have been completed and provided to the venue timely.
- Try to ensure, via the appropriate manager if necessary, that all visiting companies are sent a copy of both the venue's PAT policy and any other electrical requirements in advance.

- Clarify that all incoming electrical equipment fitted with a plug should be tested – this includes washing machines, hair dryers and sound equipment.
- Find out who will be in charge from the visiting company (we'll call him/her the company manager in this Guidance Note.)
- Try to make contact with the actual crew/s who will be arriving at your venue to ensure that they are aware in advance of your venue's PAT policy and to find out their electrical requirements.
- Keep a record of dates and times of all telephone calls, messages, faxes and letters to the company manager and visiting crew.

**On the day of an event, when everyone is under pressure to meet deadlines, continuing dialogue and a professional attitude are essential.**

- Check on arrival that the company manager is aware of the PAT policy and ensure that any necessary paperwork has been completed, signed by an authorised person and supplied to the venue.
- Inform the appropriate manager if you foresee any problems. Do not wait until the last minute!
- Keep an eye on the electrical equipment as it is being unloaded and set up. Try and visually inspect all equipment before powering up.
- Try to ensure that all incoming equipment is fed through RCDs.
- If you are unhappy with anything inform the company manager promptly and suggest that the problem is investigated and should be resolved before proceeding.
- Be accurate in your explanation of the problem. Don't threaten to cancel the whole show because the wiring of a mains plug on one amplifier is suspect. Remain calm and always try to suggest a way to resolve an issue.
- If the problem cannot be resolved, politely advise the company manager that, in accordance with your venue's PAT policy, you are going to have to refer the problem to your management. Immediately contact the appropriate manager who will need a clear and succinct explanation of the problem.
- If your manager is not available to make a timely decision, you will need to decide whether to allow the equipment to be used. This decision should be based on your assessment of the severity of the problem and whether there is any risk to the safety of personnel. Inform the company manager of your decision. Contact your manager at the earliest opportunity.
- If serious problems occur, and especially if the show has to be cancelled, then, after the event, there should be further discussions with management to look at lessons learned and to reassess the way in which the PAT policy is implemented. Discuss the situation, if necessary, with your Work Place or Union Safety Representative. It may also be useful to have them present during these discussions with the management.

**Further reading:**

*Advice on Electrical Safety and Portable Appliance Testing*, published by ABTT  
*Electricity at work - Safe working practices, HSG85*, published by HSE Books  
*Electrical safety at places of entertainment, GS50*, published by HSE Books

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