Periodically industry professionals within IAAPA identify a safety related issue which is important to highlight in order to ensure that stakeholders are aware of some of the industry best practices.

Special Experience Spaces Best Practices

Note: This is not an exhaustive listing and does not address every operational consideration for all special experience spaces. Each space is unique and these best practices may not apply to all types of experiences. Owner/Operators are responsible for the safety of their own operations. IAAPA assumes no responsibility for safe operation but offers these best practices to members for consideration.

Objective : The attractions industry over the years has created special indoor spaces such as Halloween horror rooms, fun houses, indoor maze puzzles, odd artifact display spaces, and, most recently, escape rooms. All are designed to create unique experiences for guests. Sometimes the experience can be overwhelming to the point where people panic, and incidents can occur. The safety of employees and guests in special experience spaces should be paramount. Attraction operators need to plan for preventing incidents and be prepared for emergency response. The following list includes fundamental features which some owner/operators have implemented when designing special experience spaces.

General Considerations:

Owner / operators should consider the best practices contained in this document along with complying with applicable laws and industry standards (ASTM, Euro Norm or ISO). The International Building Code and many local regulations have requirements for special amusement buildings.

Special experience spaces should have the following features:

- Emergency exit(s)
- A monitoring method to both see and hear activity within the space such as audio/visual surveillance systems.
- An attentive person monitoring employees and guests in the experience
- Public Address system to communicate with all persons within the space.
- Suitable fire detection
- Fire suppression systems
- Clear signage or instructions regarding safety
- A plan to inform employees and guests of a crisis inside or outside of the space to allow them to quickly extract themselves should they need (or want) to leave
- A method of communication for calling for assistance, such as phones/radios for employees to call for Emergency Medical Service/911.

Emergency Exit Considerations:

Emergency exit(s) – Research the appropriate building requirements for means of egress for business occupancy. Local regulations require various numbers of exits based the number of occupants and the maximum exit travel distance.

Escape rooms are generally designed with doors that "lock" (although some are designing the experience without locks by building win conditions or objectives that don't involve unlocking a door). If the doors are to be locked, they should use "mag locks", which hold the door shut with a powerful electromagnet. Mag locks are common in escape rooms. They are great for both game design and safety. In rooms using mag locks, players usually win by tripping a sensor that triggers the door to open. It creates a magical experience for guests. If the power fails or the fire alarm system activates, mag locks open automatically because electricity powers the magnet. This scenario offers easier safety releases than a typical door lock. The owner can install a big "push to exit" button next to the door, and during an emergency, there is no need to fumble with a key. Any player can open the door at a moment's notice. These doors have become the industry's preferred method of "lock in" experiences.

Video and Audio Monitoring Considerations:

Special experience spaces should have thorough camera and microphone coverage. An employee should be assigned to oversee the entire experience from a nearby space. This enables the employee to keep an eye on the participants in the space and end the experience if there is an emergency (inside or outside of the space). The cameras should be placed so the monitor doesn't have any blind spots. Good microphone coverage of the entire special experience space is more important because it's easier to identify an impending problem by listening to what the participants say than it is to determine what is happening by viewing their behavior. The monitor should also have a method of rapidly communicating with the participants. The most effective methods of communication would be a PA system in the space or a television monitor that displays typed messages. For escape room spaces, the communication method can be used for delivering hints. But for experiences in general, it can be used for delivering participant behavior warnings. An attentive monitor can notice malicious players breaking props or misbehaving and put a stop to the behavior**.**

Signage Considerations:

Safety instructions on how to evacuate the space in the event of an emergency should be delivered verbally along with signage as guests enter the space. Employees should also be instructed on how to respond to various emergency situations

Emergency Evacuation Considerations:

In addition to video and audio monitoring of the spaces, a plan should be developed and rehearsed to end the experience and to inform employees and guests of a crisis inside or outside of the space. The experience in the space should change dramatically by disabling theming sound / lighting effects and turning on evacuation lights and alarms to have employees and guests quickly extract themselves from the space. Provisions in the plan should include instances where the guests may need (or want) to leave the space.