7 Props

1 Key Principles

The ultimate goal is to eliminate raw materials, reduce transport, and provide props without damaging the environment.

Sourcing Ready-made Props

Sustainable theatre-making means reusing existing props and furniture wherever possible, and making sure they go on to have another life after the show.

To reduce how much they buy new, designers and props supervisors need more time for sourcing, and a flexible approach to using what's available.

Producers need to make time and budget available for that. Theatre networks can help locate the right props for the show.

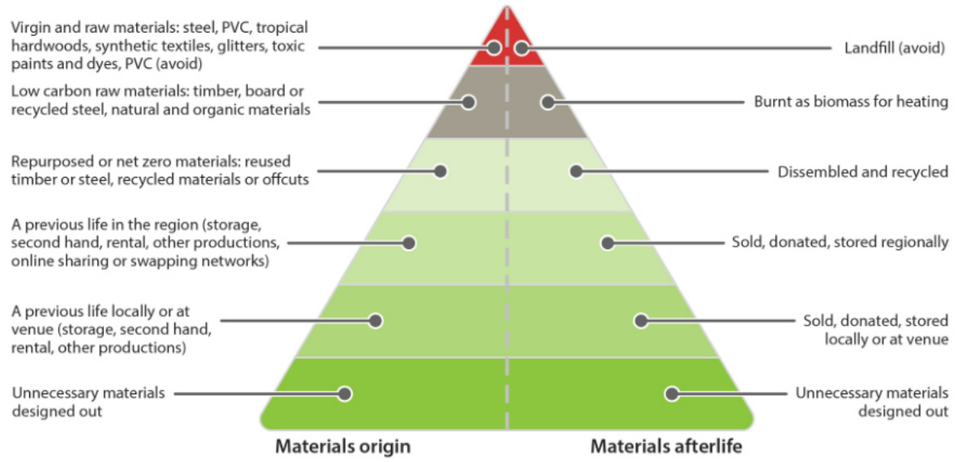
Making Props: the Materials Hierarchy

- The first step is to minimise, through design, how much material a show's fabricated props require.
- The next is to find reused components or recycled materials – ideally locally, to reduce transport.
- Failing that, new materials can at least be sourced as sustainably as possible.
- The very last resort is virgin material from unsustainable sources which harm the planet.

Workshops

Workshop practices should be made as sustainable as possible.

Go to the toolkit for guidance on sustainable workshop practice.



The Materials Hierarchy

2 Communications and Planning

Working sustainably requires collective thinking. Designers and props departments or supervisors need to start talking early to find props and furniture from sustainable sources. Producers and theatres need to provide information on what's available from store, or on local second-hand shops and networks. They should connect designers with teams working on other productions to see what can be reused.

Budget and schedule must allow for the extra communication needed between designers, production managers and makers. They must include the time needed to source props sustainably.

Designers can help by not being too specific in what they ask for. Directors can help by identifying early on the props they need for rehearsal. Where possible they can use substitutes to avoid requiring props out of sequence. Above all, they can help avoid last-minute ordering and multiple deliveries.

Last-minute changes may sometimes be unavoidable - but there needs to be a very good reason for them.

3 Reuse and Recycling

Wherever possible, it's important to source reused props and furniture, rather than making or buying new.

There are many sources to explore, already familiar to designers and props supervisors, including theatre props stores, networks of props stores in other theatres, productions being planned for the same stage, props hire companies, local second-hand shops and networks, online second-hand resources for theatre, and eBay and other online second-hand networks.

As important as buying reused props is making sure that, after the show, they return to the circular economy. Props and furniture can find a second life either through returning to store, or being sold through second-hand markets.

Go to the Toolkit for Reuse and Recycling resources.

4 Materials

Sustainable Sourcing

Props don't always use large quantities of material, but they 're often made of materials that harm the planet. Plastics, in particular, cause harm to the environment. So do many glues, paints, enamels and other chemical products.

Theatre-makers can reduce their impact by finding alternatives to harmful materials, and specifying wood, metal and plastic sustainably. To assess materials, manufacturers' information can reveal carbon footprints and chemical content. Plastics can be compostable or recycled.

Go to the Toolkit for more information on Sustainable Sourcing.

Materials to Avoid

Some materials are particularly damaging, through scarcity, manufacture, or chemical harm. These include polystyrene, PVC and tropical hardwoods. They should be phased out of use in theatres as quickly as possible.

Go to the Toolkit for a list of Harmful Materials.

Last Minute Ordering

To avoid last minute deliveries:

- Include props and costumes earlier in the production. Encourage directors to plan what they need for rehearsal.
- Be flexible. Avoid over-specific requirements.
- Use local suppliers.
- Make single large orders, to reduce the number of deliveries.

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