

Pre-Match and Half-Time Entertainment at Football Grounds

(extracts from a letter to certifying authorities dated 23rd February 2004)

The Football Licensing Authority has been asked to give advice on the subject of pyrotechnic displays at football matches. The FLA is unable to do this at the present time, because of the possibility of legal action against a club following an incident earlier this season. Nevertheless, the FLA considers that it might be helpful to remind certifying authorities of existing advice and current good practice on pre-match and half-time entertainment generally.

Section 2 (1) of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 provides that:

“A safety certificate shall contain such terms and conditions as the local authority consider necessary or expedient to secure reasonable safety at the sports ground when it is in use for the specified activity or activities...”

In 1992 the FLA advised all certifying authorities that the safety certificate should specify in general terms the activities covered by the safety certificate, which might include not merely football matches but events such as concerts and public meetings. In addition it was recommended that certifying authorities might consider it appropriate to attach a schedule specifying what ancillary activities, for example the sale of tickets, programmes, souvenirs and refreshments, the provision of incidental entertainment, the provision of news or comment or other unspecified activities notified to and approved by the certifying authority were covered by the certificate. The FLA has recently reviewed a sample of safety certificates.

In nearly every case these list the various ancillary activities that are permitted. They also state that no special effects, displays or other arrangements (including pyrotechnics, lasers etc) shall be undertaken without the prior written consent of the certifying authority. The FLA advises that any ancillary activities mentioned in the safety certificate should have been the subject of a specific risk assessment and that any conditions considered necessary should have been inserted within the safety certificate.

Certifying authorities may wish to assure themselves that these procedures have indeed been followed. Where a certificate holder seeks authority for an activity that is not included in the safety certificate, it is essential that this is supported by a site specific risk assessment. Moreover any written permission granted by the certifying authority should clearly set out any conditions to be observed by the certificate holder. The certifying authority should ensure that it maintains a clear audit trail of each application and its outcome. These should ideally be formally reported to and recorded in the minutes of the Safety Advisory Group.

The FLA recommends, however, that where an ancillary activity, such as pre-match or half-time entertainment pyrotechnics or fireworks displays, takes place on a regular basis this should be specifically included within the safety certificate, together with such terms and conditions as the certifying authority considers necessary or expedient. The granting of written permission outside the safety certificate should be limited to those matters which occur only occasionally and would therefore not justify amending the safety certificate.