

Pausing or Stopping the Show

By Iain Morrison, Event Professional, Trainer, & Consultant, Australia, March 2026

If you've ever worked an outdoor show, you already know the truth. Weather isn't the scariest variable. **People guessing is.**

The Lesson from Sydney

I learned that properly at the Sydney Opera House. We stopped shows for wind, lightning, flying debris — all the usual reasons. And the weather was rarely the thing that made it messy.

The messy part was the moment *before* the call. Someone would ask on radio, slightly too calm:

"Are we stopping?"

That question sounds harmless. It isn't. Because it usually means the same thing: **Nobody is sure who's allowed to say stop — and nobody is sure what happens next.**



The Trap

Most teams treat show stops as "obvious".

They assume:



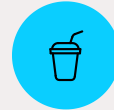
Someone senior will call it



Everyone will hear it



Everyone will react the same way



Restarting will sort itself out

That's how confusion spreads.

I've been guilty of this myself. You walk a site often enough and you start to believe your own familiarity is shared by everyone else. It isn't. Not on a mixed crew. Not with contractors. Not with agency staff. Not when the stage is changing under your feet.

What Confusion Looks Like in the Wild

You'll recognise these instantly:

Miscommunication

FOH thinks stage called it. Stage thinks control called it.

Siloed Response

Security moves, but nobody tells medical what's changing.

Partial Pause

The artist pauses, but the site keeps running like nothing happened.

Mixed Messages

Three different messages hit the crowd, and the crowd makes its own story.

Premature Restart

A restart happens because the rain eased... not because the operation is ready.

And in that gap, you don't just lose time. **You lose control.**

Once the crowd senses uncertainty, they fill the void. Once your teams start freelancing, you're no longer managing an incident — you're managing *opinions*.

The Standard I Protect Now

A show stop isn't a moment.

It's a procedure.

It has decision rights, language, positions, and a recovery plan. If you don't define those *before doors*, you end up defining them live — with adrenaline, noise, and a thousand eyes waiting for you to be decisive.

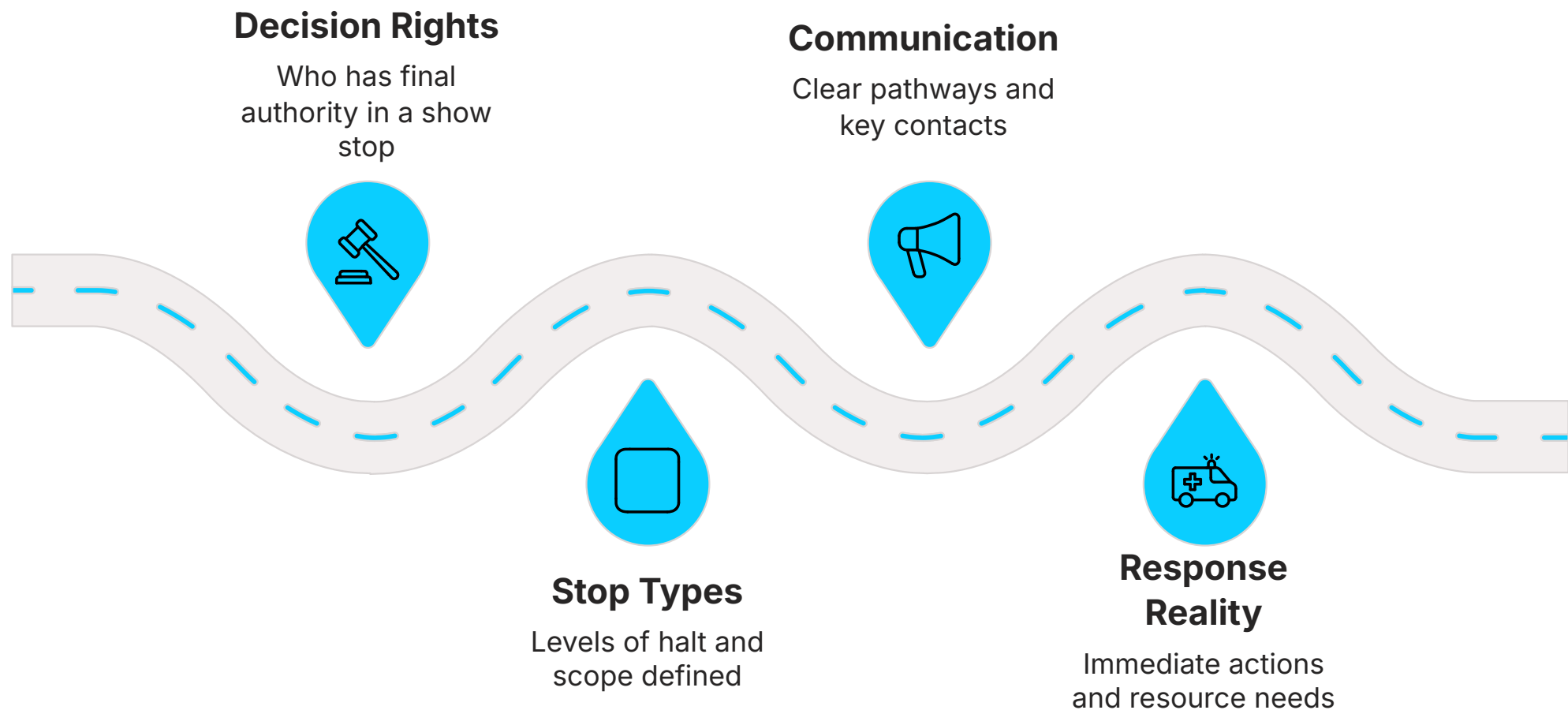
That's not professionalism. That's luck.

What Works: A Show Stop Briefing Pack

The *Show Stop Procedure Briefing Aide Memoir* (Live Safety) isn't a policy document. It's a briefing tool.

The value isn't the paper. The value is that it forces the real conversation *early*, while you still have time to correct assumptions.

Here's what it makes you lock in — and what I've seen go wrong when you don't.



Each of these five elements addresses a critical failure point in live event safety management.

1) Decision Rights

Who is authorised to stop the show.

Not "the team". Not "production". **A person or a role** — and a clear handover if they're unavailable.

- ❑ If the only answer is, "Whoever's on radio", you don't have authority. **You have noise.**



2) Stop Types (And What They Mean)

Not every stop is the same.



Hard Stop

Immediate threat to life. No debate, no delay.



Controlled Stop

Weather / urgent issues where you need a managed pause.



Artist Led Stop

The artist stops for something they can see — then you decide when site safety takes over, and how you hand it back.

If your site doesn't share definitions, you'll get three different responses to the same moment.

3) Communication Pathways

This is where most plans die.

You need *exact wording* for radio. You need a clear pathway between stage, key personnel, and command/control. You need a physical back up (show stop card / hand signals) because radio isn't always the truth in a loud environment.

1

Exact Radio Wording

Pre-agreed phrases that leave zero room for interpretation.

2

Clear Pathway

Defined chain between stage, key personnel, and command/control.

3

Physical Backup

Show stop card / hand signals because radio isn't always the truth in a loud environment.

4

Identified Position

Where does the person actually stand to deliver the stop?

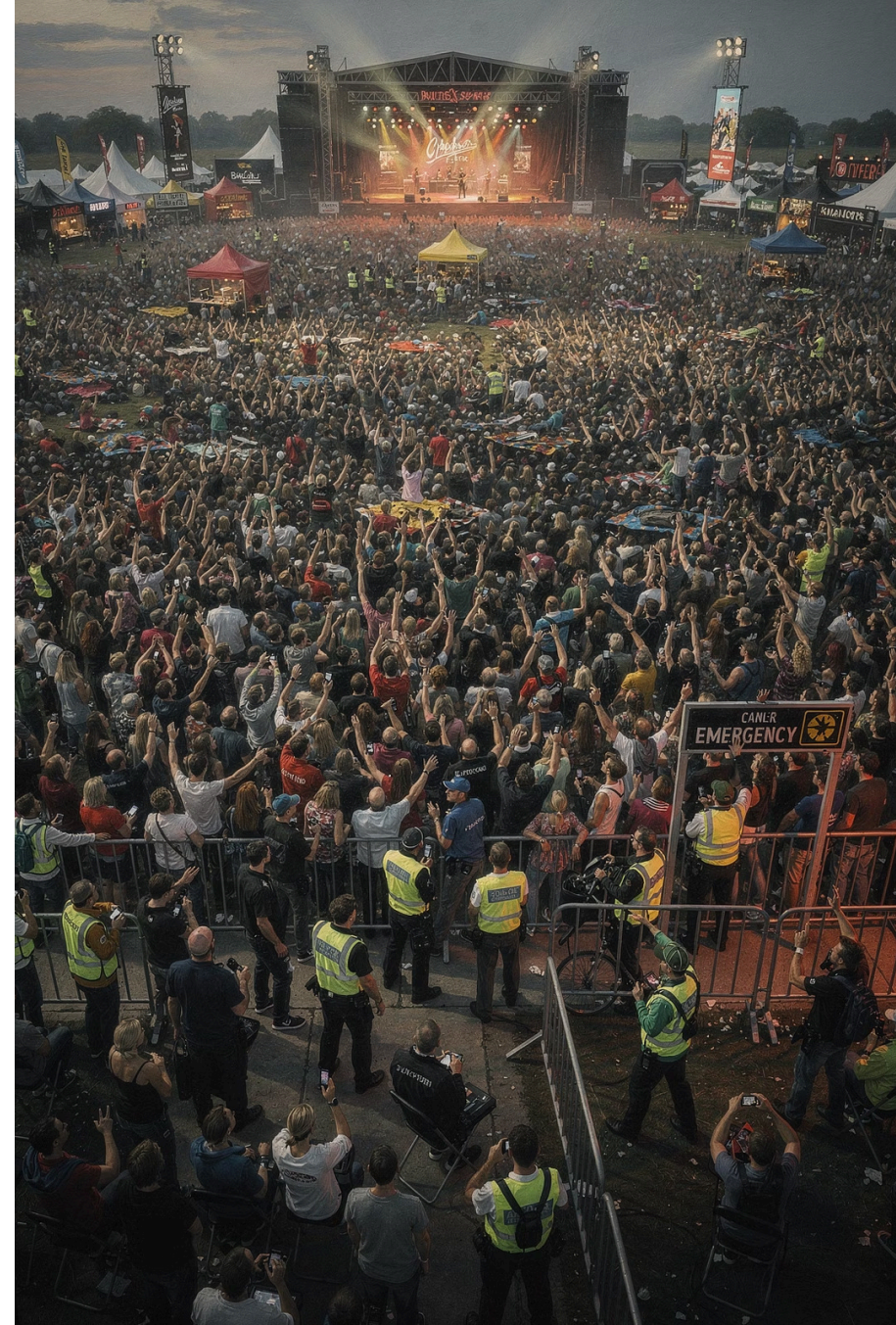
Also: where does the person actually stand to deliver the stop? Stages are constantly changing environments to people who aren't on them all day. If you don't identify the position, you can lose thirty seconds just trying to find the right human.

4) Response Reality

A show stop triggers consequences across the site.

- If security surges to the front, who covers the exits?
- If the crowd compresses, who's watching pinch points?
- If you pause for weather, what does medical do?
- What resources are available right now — and are teams trained to recognise escalation and intervene early?

☐ A show stop isn't just "stop the music". It's a **change in risk profile**. If you don't brief the knock on impacts, you'll create a second incident while trying to manage the first.



5) Restart and Recovery

This is the line I repeat until everyone's sick of hearing it:

Don't restart until you're fully capable operationally to stop again immediately if required.

Rain easing is not a restart plan. Wind dropping is not a restart plan.

A restart is a decision: checks complete, comms stable, positions reset, responder agencies aligned (if they're in play), and the crowd informed in a way that doesn't create panic or false confidence.



Restart Scenarios: What You Must Plan For



If You're Evacuating

Do you have phases? Do you need crossing points opened? Do you need assembly areas prepared? Who controls the next steps?

And then, once the dust settles: **debrief**. Capture what happened, what you did, what you'd change. If show stops keep repeating, it's rarely bad luck. **It's usually a lesson you haven't systematised.**



If You're Locking Down

Have you identified safe holding areas and the order of external assistance?



If You're Cancelling

What are your recovery aims and what support is available for people affected?

The One Minute Brief I Do Before Doors

Before we debate scenarios, I lock five things:

- 1 Who can call the stop**
By role and name
- 2 The exact words we'll use on comms**
Pre-agreed, no ambiguity
- 3 What "pause" means vs what "stop" means**
Shared definitions across all teams
- 4 Who speaks to the crowd**
And through what channel
- 5 What must be true before we restart**
Operational readiness criteria

That minute changes the whole tone of a site. It moves the team from hoping to operating.



The Hard Truth

**If your show stop
plan lives in
someone's head,
you don't have a
plan.**

You have a hope.

