



# Smoldering

## Key Themes

- Risk and Reputation
- Consequences
- Complacency
- Leadership
- Culture

## Target Audience

Senior Leaders, Transport and Infrastructure, Safety Professionals

## Synopsis

On the 18th November 1987, 31 people died and 60 were injured when an escalator caught fire at King's Cross Underground station. The subsequent investigation and the Fennell report uncovered numerous factors which contributed to the disaster. As Desmond Fennell, QC wrote;

*'The principal lesson to be learned from this tragedy is the right approach to safety. London Underground rightly prided themselves on their reputation as professional railwaymen; unhappily they were lulled into a false sense of security by the*

*fact that no previous escalator fire had caused a death.'*

Staff were entirely unprepared for such an event and failed to act appropriately. Fires on the underground were accepted by senior management as inevitable and advice from the London Fire Brigade was ignored. London Underground had its own language for a fire – they referred to it as 'smouldering'. The definition of smouldering is; 'burning slowly without flame, usually emitting smoke'. Unfortunately, as Fennell pointed out in his report;

*'London Underground did not guard against the unpredictability of fire.'*

This workshop dramatises the events of the 18th November, using the words from the transcripts of the Fennell Enquiry. We explore the immediate causes as well as the organisational and cultural factors which allowed a very well-known hazard to become a deadly conflagration.

Sadly in this 30th anniversary year of the King's Cross fire, we are still learning just how unpredictable and deadly a fire can be.

To book or for more information about this play, or any other training, please contact:

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