

DRUM CORPS INTERNATIONAL
RULES PROPOSAL FORM

This form must be filled out thoroughly and succinctly. All critical information should be included to maximize the understanding of the rule and its consequences by all involved in the rule adoption process. This form should stand on its own as a summary of your proposal. Incomplete forms will be returned. If you wish to attach further supporting information you may enclose attachments.

TITLE OF PROPOSED CHANGE: Amplification equipment of any kind may not be used. (2009 Implementation)

DESCRIPTION:

No amplification equipment of any kind may be used. All instruments must be completely acoustic. Intentional use of amplification equipment will result in a 25 point penalty at the discretion of the contest coordinator. If none is available, the chief judge may grant the penalty.

PURPOSE: (Why make this change-what are the benefits?)

The introduction of amplification equipment has been controversial. There have been some successes and some failures in its use. Given that corps, designers, and instructors have now had three complete seasons to work with amplification equipment, one might expect the failures resulting from the use of amplification equipment to have been minimized. Based on my own personal observations from attending approximately 15 competitions each summer, as well as feedback from personal friends attending other competitions and reviews of competitions posted on internet discussion forums, there has not been a tangible reduction in these equipment failures. As a result, I believe that the activity should revisit the decision to permit the use of amplification equipment in its entirety. This proposal is based on the notion that the benefits of amplification simply do not outweigh the costs and other negative impacts on the corps, DCI, and the audience.

The specific sections shown below in this proposal articulate the impacts on the various aspects of the activity; however, they can be summarized as follows:

- There are no clear educational benefits for members through using amplification equipment.
- There are minimal creative impacts on instrumentation or show design, based on use demonstrated over the past three seasons.
- Use of amplification equipment only increases the direct operating costs to the corps. It may also have an indirect fiscal impact on corps and the DCI organization from decreased ticket sales, souvenir sales, and donations.
- There is a significant segment of the audience that seems to be opposed to the use of amplification, and this segment has been rather vocal in their disagreement with its use.
- Amplification equipment has only increased the logistical burden for corps themselves.
- Judges, whether they will admit it or not, have struggled to deal with issues caused by amplification equipment, as evidenced by sever equipment failures and severe ensemble imbalance issues occurring when there is no tangible impact on the scores assigned.

This proposal has a neutral effect on the educational impact for members. It has a minimal impact on the creative aspects, as demonstrated by the use to date. This proposal reduces the operating costs for corps, which has only a positive direct fiscal impact on the corps, and may translate into indirect positive impacts as well. This proposal eases logistical burdens for the corps as well as show promoters. Additionally, it will eliminate confusion in the judging system that will benefit not only the judges, but help the audience better understand the results.

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT: (How does this benefit the students educationally?)

If this proposal passes, members can once again focus solely on their own performance. Members could once again perform without the worry of whether their performance will be impacted by factors outside of their control, such as non-functioning or malfunctioning amplification equipment (i.e., microphones, amplifiers, sound board, etc.). Members will not have to worry about practicing under different conditions when power is simply not available. Members will not have to experience panic and terror when amplification equipment fails to work properly at a competition.

One argument in favor of amplification equipment is that it would permit the performers in the front ensemble to play with “proper” technique. Use of amplification equipment does allow members of the front ensemble to perform with a different technique than they would use without amplification; however, it is important to note that this technique is just that - different. It is not the same technique that is used to perform indoors in concert type conditions, so it is difficult to argue that “proper” technique can be used with the use of amplification equipment. This proposal would require members of the front ensemble to use a different playing technique than they would use indoors in a concert setting. However, the brass section and the field percussion sections do not play with the same technique that would be used for

indoor concert settings either. Singling out the front ensemble for technique reasons simply is not a valid argument. Members will be impacted whether amplification is used or not, since the technique they would employ under either condition would be different than the technique used for indoor concert performances.

CREATIVE IMPACT: (How does this affect the creative aspects of the activity? How does this affect designers/instructors?)

As a result of this proposal, there will be some limits on the types of instruments that can be used by the front ensemble (i.e., certain instruments, toys, noise-makers, etc. that cannot be heard in a football stadium); however, corps, designers, and instructors functioned with these limitations until 2004. While a few new instruments have been used, there has been little true innovation in instrumentation. As a result, this proposal should not have a significant creative impact on the front ensemble percussion section.

This proposal would effectively prohibit amplification of the human voice, narration, etc. Most corps do not use amplification of the human voice or narration, so prohibiting its use by prohibiting the use of amplification equipment should not have a significant impact on the creative aspects of the activity as a whole. There will be a few select corps that will take exception to this proposal; however, the overwhelming majority of corps seem to be able to design competitive shows absent amplified voice and narration. As a result, I believe this proposal will have minimal impact on the creative aspects of the activity. In fact, the limits placed on the activity are in large part what has contributed to some of the more creative shows.

FISCAL IMPACT: (How does this financially affect individual corps and the DCI organization?)

This proposal should not have any direct impact whatsoever of corps that have not historically relied on amplification equipment. For corps that have relied on amplification equipment, these corps will no longer have a need to own this equipment. Given that most corps sell their equipment after a season or two of use, corps that utilized amplification equipment have probably planned the sale of this equipment already. As a result, this proposal would not have a direct financial impact on these corps, and their future operating costs should be lowered given there would be no need to replace this equipment.

Additionally, amplification equipment will no longer need to be insured. Equipment trailer space will not be needed to carry the equipment. There will be less equipment that will need to be carried on and off the field for rehearsal and competition, which could reduce the size of trailers and platforms used to haul the equipment.

One of the arguments to support the introduction of amplification was an increase in the useful life of the front ensemble percussion equipment. This argument has not proven to be valid, as most corps sell their front ensemble percussion equipment after only a few years use. Amplification equipment does not impact the useful life of the front ensemble percussion equipment for the corps, since they are not keeping this equipment for its useful life. Other arguments in favor of amplification equipment included reductions in the size of the front ensemble, which has yet to occur.

The introduction of amplification equipment has only increased the operating costs for corps, and the financial arguments supporting amplification have proved invalid. This proposal will only reduce the operating costs for all corps that currently use amplification equipment.

There is no fiscal impact on the DCI organization resulting from this proposal.

AUDIENCE IMPACT: (How will this affect our audience and their perceptions of the activity?)

Overall, I would expect the majority of the audience would view this proposal very favorably. The introduction of amplification equipment has been highly controversial, and there is significant confusion on how amplification is incorporated into the scores (if at all).

Discussion on the internet-based discussion forums, which consists of former marching members current marching members, instructors, judges, parents, volunteers, and fans indicate there is a significant number of fans that are opposed to the use of amplification equipment in the drum corps activity. While these loyal fans should not be the only voices heard, they should not be ignored. Fan discontent with amplification equipment, narration, and the direction the activity is headed in this regard was heard loud and clear this past summer at DCI World Championships from the ticket paying audience, and it has been heard the past few years as well.

Given the success of this activity is based in large part on the financial support from the paying audience (i.e., those that buy the tickets, purchase products such as CD's and DVD's, contribute time and money, pay for their children's participation, etc.), I believe the activity should listen a little more closely to this audience. While the creative side of the activity (i.e., designers, instructors, etc.) may not agree with this proposal, the financial realities presented by the opinions of those that financially support the activity should not be summarily dismissed.

SHOW PROMOTER IMPACT: (How will this affect the show promoters-financially and logistically as it relates to contest production?)

There is no financial impact on the show promoters at all resulting from this proposal. Logistically, show promoters will no longer have to worry about a power source for competitions.

LOGISTICS IMPACT: (How will this impact the operations of the individual drum corps and the DCI organization?)

This proposal will reduce the logistical impacts on each corps. Members will no longer have to deal with the loading and unloading of amplification equipment at rehearsal facilities and contest locations. Eliminating this equipment will reduce set up time, fewer people will be required to carry the equipment to and from the competition field, and delays resulting from attempts to resolve amplification equipment failures will become but a memory. Corps will not have to spend time and experience frustration searching for power at rehearsal facilities, or if they use generators, they will not have to incur the cost or deal with the logistics of maintaining and using a generator.

JUDGING IMPACT: (How does this impact the adjudication process and individual judge?)

There should not be any impact on the adjudication process or any individual judges as a result of this proposal. It was not clear how amplification was incorporated into the existing judging sheets. Equipment malfunctions did not appear to have any impact whatsoever on a corps scores.

There are numerous instances where amplification equipment has failed to work properly, severely marring the member’s performance, yet there is not tangible effect on scores. There have also been numerous instances where amplification equipment has created severe imbalance issues between the front ensemble percussion that is amplified and the field percussion and brass section; yet there is no apparent impact on the ensemble music or general effect music caption scores. Significant imbalance situations have occurred not just during the season, but also at DCI World Championships – including DCI Finals.

The rules permitting amplification equipment (and the related prohibitions on amplification of brass and field percussion) have proved to be unenforceable. The set-up and design of the amplification equipment has resulted in amplification of musicians on the field without penalty. Further, most mixing boards have devices that allow for equalization and other mixing effects that are not currently permitted, there is no verification taking place to determine whether the levels on the sound boards are flat. As a result, it is simply not possible to enforce whether these prohibited features are used. This situation is analogous to corps using three valved instruments when only two valved instruments were permitted, and corps simply stating they won’t use the third valve.

Prohibiting use of amplification equipment resolves this confusion, and it returns control over the performance to the marching members.

Lastly, amplification equipment is ineffective in domed stadiums. The acoustics in the domed stadiums prevent the amplified sounds from blending effectively with the brass and percussion instruments that are completely acoustic. . DCI World Championships are scheduled to be held in Indianapolis, IN for nine of the next ten years. The stadium in Indianapolis, IN has a retractable roof, and it is quite possible that the roof will in fact be closed during these performances. These acoustic issues should not be an issue that the judges or the fans have to contend with at DCI World Championships.

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