Portable Dome Horrors!

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BIOGRAPHIES
Ben Brown founded Explorer Dome with Shaaron Leverment in 1998 and they have created one of the UK’s leading science outreach organisations presenting lively, hands-on science shows to over 50,000 people every year. Josh Yates joined the team in 2006 and they now operate 4 mobile domes, a series of chemistry shows & workshops and represent E&S’s Digistar Lite in the UK & Ireland on behalf of Skypoint srl. With 20 years on the road, thousands of school visits, training and management of 50 professional planetarium presenters and over a million children seeing their shows they look forward to sharing their experiences and hearing from the international community.

ABSTRACT
In a break from the usual format, this is a session is all about sharing! Let's share the deepest darkest and most horrible experience inside your mobile dome, why they happened and how you overcame them. Anyone had problems with schools overbooking students into shows? Any issues with health and safety when the teacher leaves the dome half-way through the show? Sound familiar? What about payment, travel, longs days, exhaustion, cancellations and terrible student behaviour? Have you had someone die inside your dome...? One of our facilitators has! (although the individual was resusitated.)

This session has 2 aims: let's share some of these stories that only happen to us - the mobile dome planetarium presenters! It is likely we share similar experiences and can benefit from hearing inventive solutions. We also want to share the success: We also want to share the success: How do you get that re-booking? How do you expand? How have you managed to be here in Toulouse, when so many portable domes have not found enough work to continue?

This is a session dedicated to enjoying our international similarities and differences. Let's find out a little about how much we have in common with nations around the world and, we hope, how much we can learn from each other.

Full details of this session will be submitted following the session with a record of who attended, what secrets were shared (where appropriate!) and what solutions were discussed. Watch this space…

THE SESSION
Taking place in a wonderful mobile dome (with integrated inflatable seating!) set up within Cite de l’Espace’s Astralium, the session was attended by about 20 delegates from Japan, Czech Republic, UK, USA, Italy, France, Spain, Korea and Poland for a truly international flavour.

Delegates included those operating mobile domes as vendors, private businesses, academic institutions and as part of a science centre’s outreach provision, including one institution aiming to provide a mobile dome temporarily while their main dome is closed for refurbishment.

Various topics were discussed and some solutions offered, but the primary benefit of the session seemed to be to share experiences with each other and learn how much we all have in common. Portable Dome Horrors included:

- Audience falling asleep – common in fixed domes, but rare in mobile domes
- Presenter falling asleep – many delegates had experienced working exceptionally long hours, feeling tired while driving and having to take un-scheduled breaks with resulting audience criticism (95 shows in 4 days in one case!)
- Power cut – most often caused by operator error/carelessness, but the need for emergency lighting emphasized
- Medical – awareness of who is responsible for First Aid; one operator experienced a child suffering epileptic fit resulting in heart stopping, although swift medical intervention resuscitated the individual; DLP projector flickering suspected as a possible trigger by some operators
- Young children crying a frequent issue
- Mobile phones and associated light/noise also causing frequent problems
Finally, the winning horror was reportedly experienced by the Travelling Telescope in Kenya (although they were not present to support the anecdote) where armed militia interrupted a show and the operators had to keep the show going at gunpoint without knowing until afterwards whether the soldiers were hostile or friendly.