

Management of firearms and weapons in film and TV productions

HSE information sheet

Entertainment Information Sheet No 20

Introduction

This information sheet is one of a series produced by the Joint Advisory Committee for Entertainments (JACE). It gives specific guidance about the management of firearms and weapons in film and TV productions.

It is aimed at production organisations, their employees and freelancers who may be exposed to risks from firearms and weapons whilst working on film and TV productions. More guidance is available on some of the topics (see Further reading).

In this information sheet, 'must' is used only where there is an explicit legal requirement to take a certain action, 'should' is used to indicate what to do to comply with the law – although dutyholders are free to take other action if that would result in compliance.

Definitions

- **Firearm** includes live weapons, air weapons, blank firing weapons, imitation, replica and deactivated firearms.
- **Weapon** includes any object which is designed for the purpose of inflicting bodily harm such as crossbows, catapults, any sharp-edged instruments used in a fight sequence (swords and knives) or martial arts weapons (such as rice flails) and batons, swords, spears and longbows. This guidance also covers articles such as replica weapons and props which are not designed specifically for the purpose of inflicting bodily harm but which may pose such a risk when used as a weapon.
- **Armourer** is a person who makes, repairs or sells firearms. This will normally be a registered firearms dealer (RFD), their agent or another properly authorised person. An armourer should be involved in any production where live or blank-firing firearms are to be used.
- **Weapons expert or competent person** is

someone who has the necessary knowledge, experience and training to advise on safe use of the weapon. This could have come from specific training, experiential learning in the entertainment industry or expertise in certain sports, eg martial arts.

What the law says

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (the HSW Act) requires employers to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and safety of all employees and anyone who may be affected by their work. This will include affected freelance staff and members of the public.

Other legislation may apply depending on the details of the work being carried out. For instance, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build on the requirements in the HSW Act and require dutyholders to assess and control risks.

Legislation regarding the provision and use of firearms, bladed weapons and knives will apply to some activities during film and TV production. Those in control of productions should liaise with the police early in their planning process and ensure all relevant licence/permission criteria have been followed.

Roles and responsibilities

The legal duties for health and safety rest with the employer. This normally means the production company. On a day-to-day basis, the overall responsibility for ensuring that the appropriate standards of health and safety are achieved and maintained throughout the production process normally rests with the producer.

In this information sheet, the term producer is used to represent the person in overall control of the production activity.

The producer is responsible for ensuring appropriate communication, coordination and control of the overall event, taking into account any risk assessments from others, including the person in charge of firearms and weapons and any other specialist contractors involved in the production.

Hazards

The following hazards are associated with the use of firearms and weapons within a production:

- flying objects, eg projectiles (arrows, bolts etc) and incidental flying objects such as spent cases ejected from automatic and semi-automatic firearms – spent cases may be hot and can travel several metres;
- blast and impact injury caused by projectiles, burning gases, unburned propellant, wadding and debris discharged from weapons – all of these hazards apply to live and blank ammunition;
- unintentional discharge of weapons;
- noise levels from discharging ammunition – both blank and live is often in excess of 100 dB(A);
- smoke;
- laser light from weapon sights;
- sharp edges/splinters created during the intended destruction of wooden weapon handles during combat scenes;
- contact injury or wounding from weapons such as swords and lances caused for example by:
 - inexperienced users (artistes, extras etc);
 - fatigue;
 - ill-fitting costumes and helmets that may restrict movement or visibility;
 - use in difficult circumstances, ie when negotiating thick ground cover or when subject to awkward and restrictive movement such as in buildings.

Risk assessment

The producer must make sure risks arising from the work are controlled. To do this they must think about what things in the workplace might cause harm to people and take such steps as are necessary to eliminate or reduce the risk to acceptable levels.

This process is known as risk assessment and it is required by law. If there are fewer than five employees it does not have to be written down.

The risks from the use of firearms and weapons must be assessed and controlled in the same way as any other risk to the health and safety of those involved in film and broadcasting.

The producer must as part of the risk assessment process include the risks from the use of firearms and weapons. They must review it, as necessary, in light of new information and as the production situation changes. This assessment will inform discussions about how to proceed with the production, what controls must be put in place and what circumstances would cause the production to be significantly changed or halted. Most incidents involving firearms and weapons can be avoided or their effects reduced with pre-planning and a thorough knowledge of the equipment, the hazards it presents and how it should or should not be used.

Risk management

The use of firearms and weapons in TV and film productions can carry significant risk if they are faulty or are used incorrectly. Those in control of the production must ensure they use people that are competent in all aspects of their provision and use.

People working with firearms and weapons must continually assess the effectiveness of any controls they have in place and monitor their surroundings to make sure any changes will not affect their safe use. They should have the authority to stop work if a risk to people becomes apparent and they should ensure the producer is aware of any changes they believe are necessary to ensure their safety and that of others.

When deciding on risk controls, those in charge of the production should, with the armourer/weapons expert/competent person, consider the following:

- Ensure people in charge of firearms and weapons have the appropriate levels of training and competence required to ensure safe use.
- Regular inspection of firearms/weapons during the production to make sure they remain in safe condition.
- Put in place procedures to withdraw and make safe misfired firearms.
- Are any extra controls needed if firearms are to be discharged towards people?
- Ensure all involved in the production have received adequate briefing about the use of and risks from firearms and weapons.

- Restrict the number of people on set during the use of the firearm or weapon and define and police exclusion areas – use remote cameras where possible, especially when these may be in a danger area.
- Use filming techniques, camera angles, long lenses and camera heights to reduce the risks to artistes and camera crews.
- Protect camera crews and, where possible, artistes and other exposed members of the production crew with screens/buffers etc where they cannot be remote from the action.
- Set up good sightlines for those supervising the use of the firearms/weapons to ensure their safe use.
- Provide adequate time and resources for rehearsals, safety briefings and reappraisal of controls – this is especially important if the people handling weapons are inexperienced.
- Provide adequate emergency cover to cope with foreseeable events, eg first aid.
- Choose the least hazardous firearm/weapon suitable for the shot, eg use a replica rather than a real firearm, blunted rather than sharp edged blades etc.
- Control noise and reduce the numbers of people exposed to it.
- Provide secure storage arrangements for firearms, ammunition and weapons during transit and when not in use.
- Secure storage for ammunition, separate from the firearms – live and blank ammunition should never be mixed and should be stored in separate containers.
- Ensure appropriate weapons are used and that the risks from them are minimised:
 - bladed weapons are blunted unless needed to cut something in shot;
 - soft-tipped weapons are preferable to wooden or plastic alternatives;
 - weapon blades must be of the same material in fight scenes, eg steel with steel.

Notification to the police

If a firearm/weapon is to be used, or could be seen or heard in a public place, the producer must ensure that the police force in the area is informed. Details of the notification must be kept by the senior person on site.

All members of the production crew and anyone likely to be handling firearms or weapons must be briefed on what to do if a police armed response team arrives on site.

Further reading

Risk assessment: A brief guide to controlling risks in the workplace Leaflet INDG163(rev4) HSE 2014
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.htm

Safe use of guns Leaflet AIS43 HSE 2013
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais43.htm

Film, TV and broadcasting www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/theatre-tv/film.htm

Noise at work www.hse.gov.uk/noise/index.htm

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

This document is available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/etis16.htm.

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