

Stunts, fights and other potentially hazardous production activities

HSE information sheet

Entertainment Information Sheet No 17

Introduction

This information sheet is one of a series produced by the Joint Advisory Committee for Entertainments (JACE). It gives specific guidance about controlling the risks from stunts, fights and similar hazardous activities in the broadcast and film industries.

It is aimed at production organisations, their employees and freelancers who may be exposed to risks to their safety from these activities during broadcast or filming.

Examples of activities this guidance relates to are:

- performing stunts that have the potential to cause harm to the performer or others;
- stunts that include the use of external hazards such as fire and explosives;
- the use of aircraft, motor vehicles or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for filming or as part of the activity;
- sequences performed in confined spaces, underwater or in other areas where breathing may be impaired;
- fights, with or without weapons.

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.

For the purposes of this guidance, a stunt is where a competent person, such as a professional stunt performer or coordinator, simulates or coordinates a dangerous or apparently dangerous activity in a controlled manner during the production of a cinema film or television production.

This guidance does not cover private individuals engaging in adventure activities or dangerous sports. For dangerous sports or other physically demanding production activities, a competent specialist should

provide advice and guidance on the safe design and execution of the activity. When filming these, a stunt coordinator may be required to oversee the activity, eg where direction requires modifications for dramatic effect.

What the law says

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

Reasonably practicable means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the real risk in terms of money, time or trouble. However, you do not need to take action if it would be grossly disproportionate to the level of risk.

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 upon the requirements in the HSW Act and require dutyholders to assess and control risks.

Other regulators (the police, Civil Aviation Authority etc) using other legislation (the Firearms Acts, Violent Crime Reduction Act etc) may place further duties on producers regarding the safe use of real and imitation weapons, aircraft, explosives and vehicles. This should be taken into account early in the planning process.

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 stunt coordinator and any other specialist contractors involved in the production.

The stunt coordinator should also liaise closely with the director to make sure there is no conflict between the proposals and editorial intent that could adversely affect safety.

Hazards

The hazards which may be present will depend on the nature of the proposed stunt/activity. Typical hazards may include, but are not limited to, the following, either in isolation or combination:

- fire, heat and/or explosion from pyrotechnics;
- noise;
- moving vehicles or equipment;
- manned or unmanned aircraft;
- animals;
- weapons;
- water;
- confined spaces, oxygen-deficient or suffocating atmospheres;
- projectiles and other flying debris;
- mobile phones and other radio signals that could interfere with both firing and control systems;
- falls from height;
- light sources;
- broken, uneven or slippery surfaces;
- extreme weather.

Risk assessment

The producer in control of broadcast or film production work must ensure 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

something required by law. If there are fewer than five employees it does not have to be written down.

The risks to people from stunts, fights and other potentially hazardous production activities 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 risk assessment must be reviewed as necessary in light of new information and as the situation changes. This process is sometimes called dynamic risk assessment.

The risk assessment will inform discussions about how to proceed with the production, what controls must be put in place and whether and how changes to those controls should be made to ensure safety.

Risk management

HSE produces general guidance on the safe management of a number of hazardous activities that may be involved in stunts and fights. This can be found on the HSE website.

Hierarchy of risk control

When deciding how to control risks from stunts, fights and similar production activities, you should consider:

- eliminating the risk by redesigning the stunt so that the hazard is removed or eliminated (eg Can the risk to stunt performers be avoided by using CGI techniques?);
- substituting materials or processes with a less hazardous version, for example:
 - where there is more than one way to achieve the desired artistic effect, such as a 'jerk back' stunt, use the safest method possible;
 - construct sets and props with materials that would be less hazardous if they fail/fall etc.

Where it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate or substitute, you must implement effective risk control measures in the following order.

Engineering controls – Design or engineer the work so that risks are reduced to the minimum to achieve the necessary end and give priority to measures which protect collective over individual measures:

- Ensure flash and/or radiant heat is limited to the minimum necessary and controlled so that it cannot cause injury or fire.

- Reduce or control noise so that it cannot cause damage to people's hearing.
- Control blast to ensure it is directed into areas where it is required or where it can safely dissipate.
- Reduce flying debris, shrapnel, particles etc to the minimum necessary to achieve the effect and provide protective screens, establish exclusion zones etc to protect workers and others who may be affected.
- Wherever possible, design moving parts of sets to reduce the risk of injury should they malfunction or come into contact with people.

Administrative controls – Identify and implement the procedures you need to work safely:

- Use competent people to advise on, plan and execute stunts and other hazardous activities. See detail under Competence.
- Reduce risks to camera crews and stunt performers by using cutaways, camera angles etc.
- Ensure safe working distances are identified by competent people and are adhered to.
- Have an agreed system in place to make sure stunts can be stopped promptly and safely if something happens that may affect the safety of any person.
- Cueing for stunts, fights or other hazardous activities should only take place once all the necessary risk control measures are in place.
- Ensure contingency plans are in place for unexpected situations/outcomes, eg first aid, firefighting.
- Plan and manage exclusion zones with outside agencies such as the police/local authorities as necessary.
- Ensure specialist advice is available during particularly hazardous work involving, for example:
 - structures;
 - rigging;
 - water;
 - aircraft;
 - weapons;
 - rigging;
 - special effects.
- Ensure any rigs to be used are inspected and tested by competent people prior to use.
- Where weather may affect the safety of a stunt, the stunt coordinator should monitor the situation

closely and advise the producer accordingly.

- Ensure all personnel that are involved or could be affected by the stunt are fully briefed as to their roles, what will happen and how they can stay safe.
- Build sufficient planning and rehearsal time into the production to allow for changes and to make sure those involved know exactly what is happening and can work safely.
- Stunt coordinators may be required to oversee the dramatic effects when activities such as circus performers, free runners or precision drivers are used on a production.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) – Only after all the previous measures have been considered and found not to be effective in controlling risks to a reasonably practicable level, must properly-fitted PPE be used:

- Any necessary PPE, eg safety glasses, work-positioning equipment, hearing protection etc, must be suitable for the hazards involved, must be fitted, and must be worn and used correctly.
- People using PPE must be trained in its use.

Execution

The stunt coordinator should monitor the safety arrangements during the rehearsal and execution of the action.

Before commencing any stunt or fight action, the producer and stunt coordinator should make such checks as are necessary to ensure that control measures such as exclusion zones, emergency arrangements, PPE etc are in place, and are effective.

The stunt coordinator should have best sight of the action and its immediate area at all times and be able to communicate with all key personnel.

Competence

Producers should make sure that only those people who have the necessary competence, knowledge, experience and training should be involved in stunt work. Different levels of competence and supervision may be needed for simple or complex stunts.

Advice on competence in this specialist area can be found at www.jigs.org.uk/stunts.

Stunts should normally be conducted by a stunt performer competent for the stunt to be performed. In exceptional circumstances, and where the requirements for competence and experience are satisfied, they can be performed by an actor or other specialist (but only under the supervision of a stunt coordinator).

The stunt performer/coordinator must satisfy themselves that they have sufficient competence to undertake the specific stunt being undertaken.

A competent stunt coordinator or competent stunt performer who is not participating in the stunt should be engaged to monitor and supervise the activity.

The stunt coordinator (or competent stunt performer in the case of solo stunts) should assess the risks inherent in the stunt and make sure adequate controls are identified and implemented.

Stunt coordinators should ensure that those involved in stunts are competent for the work being done and to satisfy themselves that the producer has done so in relation to other specialists selected by production, eg SFX, rigging.

Further reading

Plan, Do, Check, Act: An introduction to managing for health and safety Leaflet INDG275(rev1) HSE 2013
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg275.htm

Controlling noise at work. The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005. Guidance on Regulations L108 (Second edition) HSE 2005 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l108.htm

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

Entertainment and leisure resources www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/theatre-tv/resources.htm

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

Joint Industry Grading Scheme (JIGS) www.jigs.org.uk

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.

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