

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 while 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. Dutyholders are free to take other action which will comply with the law.

Definitions

- **Firearm** includes a lethal barrelled weapon, prohibited weapon, or component parts.
- **Realistic weapon (RIF)** is any imitation firearm that is indistinguishable from a real firearm.
- **Imitation firearms** can include imitation, blank firing, replica and deactivated weapons.
- **Air weapons** are also defined within the Firearms Act 1968. Weapons that are able to fire live ammunition, or live ammunition itself should never be taken to set for use in filming activities.
- **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. Depending upon the type of weapon to be used you may need to use an armourer who holds a [section 5 licence](#). You should ensure that you are aware of what your production needs are and select a competent armourer accordingly.
- **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, for example 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 freelance staff and members of the public.

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

Specific laws about 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 force responsible for the area where filming will take place. They should do this early in their planning process and ensure all relevant licence/permission criteria have been followed.

Roles and responsibilities

The employer, normally the production company, is legally responsible for health and safety. Day to day, the producer has overall responsibility for ensuring that appropriate standards of health and safety are achieved and maintained throughout the production.

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

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

The producer may delegate duties to other competent persons. But the producer must satisfy themselves that a person is competent to take on a task. The producer will remain the overall responsible person.

Hazards

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

- flying objects, for example 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;
- unintentional discharge of weapons;
- noise levels from discharging ammunition – noise from both blank and live ammunition is often in excess of 100 dB(A);
- smoke;
- laser light from weapon sights;
- sharp edges or splinters created during the intended destruction of wooden weapon handles during combat scenes;
- injury from using a non-standard item as a weapon, for example a chair or table.

An additional hazard is a 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 when using a weapon;
- use in difficult circumstances, for example when negotiating thick ground cover or when subject to awkward and restrictive movement in buildings.

Risk assessment

The producer must make sure risks arising from the work are managed. To do this they must:

- Identify what could cause injury or illness in your business (the hazards);
- decide how likely it is that someone could be harmed and how seriously (the risk);
- take action to eliminate the hazard, or if this isn't possible, control the risk.

This process is known as managing risks and risk assessment. It is required by law. If there are fewer than 5 employees the producer does not have to record the findings. But it can help to show how the process was carried out.

Over time advances and innovations may create measures that can reduce risk or remove traditional hazards associated with an activity. Those involved in the planning and assessments process should ensure these measures are introduced where possible.

The producer must consider the risks from the use of firearms and weapons as part of the risk assessment process. They must review it, in light of any new information and as the production situation changes.

The assessment will inform discussions about:

- how to proceed;
- what controls must be put in place;
- 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. This can be done 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 used incorrectly. The producer must ensure they use people who are competent in all aspects of their provision, instruction and use.

Competent persons working with or in control of firearms and weapons must:

- continually assess the effectiveness of any controls they have in place;
- 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. 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, the producer should, with the armourer, weapons expert or competent person, consider the following.

Ensure people in charge of firearms and weapons have appropriate levels of training, competence and knowledge about the weapons required to ensure instruction of, and safe use by, third parties.

Make sure firearms or weapons are regularly inspected during the production so they remain in a safe condition.

Put procedures in place to withdraw and make safe misfired firearms.

Consider if any extra controls are needed if firearms will be discharged towards people.

Ensure everyone involved in the production has been adequately briefed 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 any police exclusion areas – use remote cameras where possible, especially when these may be in a danger area.

Use filming techniques, camera angles, long lenses, drones 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 and 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, for example first aid.

Choose the least hazardous firearm/weapon suitable for the shot, for example use a replica rather than a real firearm, blunted rather than sharp-edged blades.

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 on set or needed for rehearsal.

Provide secure storage for ammunition, separate from the firearms. Live ammunition should never be available on site, except where this is for safety reasons, for example when filming with animals.

Ensure appropriate weapons are used and that the risks from them are minimised, for example:

- 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, for example steel with steel.

Notification to the police

If a firearm or 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 are 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 and information

Health and safety in audio-visual production. Your legal duties Leaflet INDG360 HSE 2002
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg360.pdf

Managing risk and risk assessment at work
www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm

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

Health and safety in the film, theatre and broadcasting industries
www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/theatre-tv/index.htm

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

Metropolitan Police Film Unit www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/f/af/filming

Firearms Act 1968 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1968/27/contents

Section 5 licence www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-or-manage-a-section-5-shooting-club-or-museum-licence

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk. You can order HSE priced publications at <https://books.hse.gov.uk>

HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops. This publication is available on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/etis20.pdf.

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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