

SAFETY AND PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

Most safety on the set is just common sense, but in the pressures of filmmaking common sense often gets thrown to the wind and what happened on “The Twilight Zone” movie where a leading actors and two small children were killed in a helicopter crash caused the State of California to institute required safety procedures that all films must follow.

The main requirement of this law is that every film must have a safety meeting every day filming takes place outlining the potential dangers for the day and mentioning precautions that need to take place to avoid problems. This can be an informal five minute meeting between the assistant director and film department heads (DP, sound, director, art). Often this meeting is part of a larger production planning meeting that takes place every morning outlining the shot list shooting schedule for the day. You need to conduct this safety meeting everyday that you film, even if only briefly and informally.

Generally danger on the set comes from the following areas and you should take precautions accordingly. Normally the Assistant Director is the safety enforcement officer on the set. :

GENERAL CAUSALITY

This involves unsafe placements of sets, props, equipment, and cables so people trip and injure themselves unnecessarily and could in turn sue your production. The prop master will give a daily report as to that day’s props and any and all hazardous threats related to the same. Any sharp edged props (including knives) should be handled with great care. Horseplay should never be tolerated at any time while cast and crew are present on the set. No person should be coaxed into handling any prop that causes them concern.

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

Since large amounts of electricity are used for lights - the danger of blowing out circuits, overloading circuits and even starting a fires or electrocuting someone are always a hazard. Your lighting person should be familiar with the limits and safe procedures for drawing and using electricity. If you are using more than two 650 watt bulbs or one 1000 watt bulb on a single home electrical circuit, you are in danger of blowing out the circuit. There may be several wall plugs on one circuit - so don’t just assume each wall plug is a separate circuit. A normal home has about 5 different circuits, but this can vary. Become familiar with where the circuit breaker box is, or have extra fuses for the circuits. Power should be turned off when plugging or unplugging high wattage equipment. To unplug any equipment always grab the plug firmly and pull, do not grab the cord.

FIRE HAZARDS

Placing powerful lights near flammable materials (e.g. curtains) for several hours on end can cause a fire. People smoking (including in film smoking) on a set with scattered paper and flammable materials and set dressing around can cause a fire. You should have a small fire extinguisher present on all sets

Obviously using a fire in the film (e.g. campfire or part of a set burning) can be a hazard. By law if there is a fire going in the film - a licensed pyrotechnics expert must be present on the set supervising the fire.

FIREARMS

Any time guns with live ammunition are used on the set a licensed firearms expert is required by law to be present on the set supervising the scene.

However, even the use of unloaded weapons or rubber or fake weapons can be a hazard in that when the police or neighbors see what looks like a weapon they will assume that it is and often act first and ask questions later. So, the city wants you to have a permit any time even a fake weapon is used so they can inform the police of the situation in case a 911 call comes in about people seeing weapons on your set. On a student film in Los Angeles some actors were nearly killed by the police while carrying rubber guns because they police were not told about the filming.

The safest choice for films made on this short notice is not to include weapons in your film. And never include weapons in your film where they are displayed in a public place unless you have a city permit that specifies that and have cleared that permission.

ANIMALS

Snakes and deadly animals can be a hazard on the set and you need to have an exotic animal handler on the set to work with these. Rates per day for such people (who will often bring their own animals) may range from \$500 on up.

Ordinary household animals need to be treated safely on the set or there could be legal action from the Humane Society. If you are doing anything other than very ordinary shots of even household pets on a set, the Humane Society likes to be notified so they can be on the set. Make sure you have a place for the animals to rest apart out of the sun and away from the crowded set where they could get hurt. Have plenty of water and food for them.

THE CHILDREN, THE ELDERLY, AND THE DISABLED

The state has very strict regulations on the safety of minors after the “Twilight Zone” incident. Minors must have a parent or guardian on the set at all times during work hours. There are also rules about having a Welfare worker present on the set to be present for the students schooling and to watch after safety. State law even requires this on weekends. If you are employing the minor you must have a permit form the state to employ minors and the minor must have a permit from the state to work. Special precautions need to be made with children on the set to keep them from hazards that adults would normally avoid. That is why a parent or guardian must be with them at all times

Minor can only be filmed so long without having a break: (usually in the 2-4 hour range depending on age).. Other regulations apply too.. For more on minors see a reprint of state regulations at: www.lmu.edu/subdomains/sftv/eyhole/handbook/use_of_minors.pdf Also, although not required by state law, special precautions need to be made on the set for the elderly and disabled. Again this is common sense, but it is more likely that an unbalance elderly person might trip over power cables running everywhere than a grip. Also passage from one part of the set to another may be impeded for a disabled person. Preparations need to be made for these contingencies.

STUNTS

Even what are considered normal actions in everyday life can be considered stunts in filmmaking; e.g. tripping. And if in performing your script an actor attempts a minor fall and hurts themselves, you could be liable. Any stunts, even minor ones need to be planned out and rehearsed so no one is hurt. Last year when one actor was supposed to give another actor a small bump while passing another on camera, the one actor was knocked into the wall and cut skin above the eye and had to go in for immediate plastic surgery. Even simple simple stunts that the actors do themselves need to be planned and rehearsed.

Larger stunts should only be performed by licensed stuntmen and only after very careful preparation and rehearsal. Fights should be carefully rehearsed so no one gets hurt and should be staged by a professional stuntman. Remember fights are more about camera angles, editing, and post sound effects than realism on the set.

Truly dangerous stunts: falling from buildings, car crashes, car hits, death defying stunts, etc. should not be attempted in your short film shot in a week. Good films can be made in a week but there are some limits to this kind of filmmaking and they must be accepted.

DRIVING AND MOVING SHOTS

Careful preparation needs to be made for any moving shot. All traffic laws must be followed, and the person driving the car (especially if it is an actor on camera) should never be distracted by too much direction or while he or she is driving. Directors, crew, and actors sometimes get this sense of invincibility that just because they are making a film that they can do things in traffic that they would never do while driving on their own and still not get hurt: e.g. a cameraman standing in traffic to get a shot, an actor being so cramped by lights and camera, and directions while driving that he is distracted in heavy traffic, unsafe extensions of equipment from a second car filming the actor's car, driving in such a way to ignore the other traffic around the car to get the shot.

Any moving shot on a public street requires a permit and often requires police officers to be present. If a sizable number of crew are present on the street (e.g. more than two) during filming it can create a distracting hazard to other motorists and cause accidents. This is why permits are required. Also, blocking traffic to get a shot is not allowed unless police officers are present and an off duty officer usually gets about \$70 an hour with an eight hour minimum. Anyone driving a vehicle while filming must obey all state traffic laws and must have a current valid driver's license.

Moving shots also include dolly shots and crane shots at a static location. Many times the director, director of photography, and grips are preoccupied with getting the shot and don't watch where they are going. The production team needs to make sure shots are planned out and rehearsed in advance so an accident knocking down heavy equipment does not happen.

OTHER HAZARDS

These will vary from film to film and you need to use common sense to spot these. For example if you are filming in high places, you need to take precautions that all actors or crew are not put in jeopardy of falling. If you are shooting in a remote location you need to be aware that coyotes, mountain lions, and poisonous snakes do not give filmmakers a pass and precautions need to be made there. If shooting in a higher crime rate area of the city, the cast and crew again need to take precautions any normal person (including residents of the area) would when passing through in conducting business in a higher crime rate area. Overuse of fog machines can cause actors and crew respiratory damage. Never force an actor who doesn't want to smoke a cigarette as part of the film to smoke. Filming at night presents its own hazards in terms of people not seeing potential hazards early enough. You need to brainstorm potential threats on the set and be prepared for them - e.g. rope off sections of the set to cast and crew when not in use. Be careful in having a lot of guests on the set. Since they will be least familiar with what you are doing they potentially will stumble into the most danger. The safest thing is to close the set to guests; but if you do have guests, assign one crew member responsible for looking after them.

FIRST AID

The Assistant Director (or designated safety officer) should have directions and phone numbers to the nearest emergency rooms to all locations they crew will be filming at.

There should be a basic first aid kit on every set. These are easily obtainable at most drug stores. There should be one person on the set who has some first aid training designated as the first aid person who can see if a minor injury or medical condition that arises can be dealt with on the set or if it needs to be sent to the nearest emergency room.

PERMITS

Technically permits are required by the city for ALL locations (including filming in your own home) to insure that if anything the filmmakers are doing is unsafe that they city can shut down the film shoot immediately without any protest from the filmmakers. The only place permits are not required are when a shoot is on the lot of a registered film studio backlot or soundstage. Generally however, local authorities will not check permits unless you are filming with a large crew and a lot of vehicles in a location where you are creating “an attractive hazard” to automobile traffic flow, or pedestrians on the streets, sidewalks, or in public places where an accident could occur.

OTHER CALIFORNIA LAW

Craft service personnel must wash their hands with soap and running water after: using the toilet, smoking, between handling raw and cooked food. Smoking is only allowed in designated areas.

You can not work your cast and crew for more than six hours straight without breaking for a meal break. You don't have to feed them (though you will save yourself a lot of time and money if you do), but you do have to break after six hours. This is not a union regulation. It is state law.

INSURANCE

State law does not require insurance for all filming in the state. However, often permission to use others equipment or location will require that you get insurance should something go wrong on the set and safety accidentally break down. And often just common sense dictates that some insurance is wise for you to purchase.

Equipment Insurance: If you own your own equipment or a friend loans it to you, you may not need this. Most rental houses however require it for all rentals. If the rental is low enough in the replacement cost of the item rented, a rental house may allow you to put a security deposit down on your credit card that they can cash if you return the equipment damaged.

General Liability: Like general liability in homeowners insurance this insures you against ordinary accidents on the set. Most locations will require this. All city permits will require this. Usually 1 million dollars insurance is required. Local companies charge you per day of filming for this. Check www.la411.com for potential insurance companies, Filmmakers Alliance, or go in together with a few other teams and buy insurance together

Worker's Compensation Insurance: required by the state for all employees. If you pay your cast or crew anything you need to have workman's compensation insurance for them. Even if you don't pay them, if you regard them as employees working on speculation, they may still need to be covered by workman's compensation. However, if you are all donating your time to work on a ministry or educational project together, you possibly may not need to have workman's compensation, but check with a lawyer just to be sure.

Other: package insurance deals may cover all three. Other insurance that you may not need and may not even be able to get at your budget level include: non-owned auto, commercial umbrella, travel insurance, Errors and Omissions.

COMMON SENSE

Most of what has been said above is common sense. And if you apply common sense, anticipate possible dangers, do all possible preparation to avoid them, and hire licensed professionals when the risk factor and state law requires it, you should not get into trouble. Everyone on the set is responsible for safety. Don't let a driven director or producer push anyone to do something that is unsafe just to get a shot like they did in the "Twilight Zone" movie.

Any member of cast or crew who anticipates a danger on the set, or sees an actual hazard should immediately report it to the Assistant Director or designated safety officer on the set.

LAST WORD

Good films can be made in a week, but there are some limits to making a film in a week and doing it safely. You may not be able to do everything just as the budget will limit you somewhat, so will the time limits on safety prep limit you to making films that may not have some riskier shots in them. You need to be aware of and accept these to run a safe set. . . .

PRODUCER’S STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

I state that I am the registered producer on the short film our team is producing for the 168 Hour Film Project and I state that I have fully read and understand the preceding pages of “Safety and Production Guidelines” and agree to follow these guidelines to the best of my ability during the following production of our team’s short film for eventual showcasing at the 168 Hour Film Festival for the safety of myself and our cast and crew during production. I understand that our team is producing our short film and not the 168 Hour Film Project and so we are fully responsible and liable for all safety on our set.

AGREED AND ACCEPTED BY:

(signature)

(printed name)

(date)

(name of short film - to be filled in later when the film is named)