

THIS GUIDELINE IS INTENDED TO BE UTILIZED BY PROPERTY DEPARTMENT PERSONS, ACTOR & STUNT PLAYERS AND OTHERS USING BLANK FIRE ADAPTED WEAPONS.

Every production you work on will be different in terms of the personnel, cast & crew, location, weather, etc. The caliber of the firearms will differ as well as the blank ammunition operating them. Keeping these factors in mind, let's practice practical safety. Practical safety, together with common sense, must be the true director on the set. Your coworkers will be grateful when you show command presence while making safety decisions.

PROCEDURE

In the past, some operators and prop persons have instructed actors to raise the weapon above their heads after they hear, "Cut". There are several good reasons that this practice should change.

There could be a malfunction of the weapon and a late discharge, or the actor/stunt player might accidentally discharge another blank while in the raised up position. The probability of injury to the actor/stunt player is greater, because:

1. The gas release is close to your eyes and ears.
2. The gas release may be close to another cast or crew member's head and face.
3. Brass casings ejected from semi-auto pistols, assault weapons and machine guns can strike actors/stunt players about the head and face, or go down a shirt or blouse.
4. While raising and lowering the weapon, it inadvertently gets aimed at the weapon handler, who may be approaching.
5. Often, when an actor/stunt player aims away from the handler for safety, he may now be directing it toward another person to his or her side.
6. The "lowered" position is a more relaxed position for the actor/stunt player. Fewer muscle groups are used than in the raised position. If there is a discharge, it will now be directed at the ground and if brass is ejected there is less chance it will strike someone.

PROP MASTER / WEAPONS HANDLER

Basic rules while operating firearms on the set:

1. Consider discharge zones. Do NOT point near crew members or cast.
2. Consider a firearm ALWAYS loaded until YOU unload it after retrieving it from the actor/stunt player.
3. Do NOT depend on firearm safety mechanisms. Revolvers and some semi-auto pistols don't have them. Some safety mechanisms are actually in the trigger.
4. Check that internally threaded or externally mounted barrel restrictors are fitted properly and that the flash suppressor itself is firmly secured and not cracked.
5. Make sure everyone in the vicinity is wearing ear protection. People on camera can wear "foamies." ALWAYS offer ear protection.
6. Carry firearms to action positions UNLOADED.
7. Look the actor in the eye and notify him or her that the weapon is "HOT" and ready to fire when the trigger is pulled. Ask them to leave their trigger finger in "ready position" until discharge.
8. In a loud voice, notify crew that weapon is "HOT".
9. Instruct the actor / stunt player that in the event of a malfunction or jam, to raise his/her hand and then lower the weapon away from the face.

REPLICA WEAPONS

Quite often production calls for the cast and crew, stunt players or extras to carry replica firearms. On many sets, these props have been treated with complete disregard. This shows a very unprofessional attitude.

The working replica gun's value has increased in the past several years due to the new state and federal importation laws. (Most replica guns are imported.) Replica firearms should be treated with the same respect as operating firearms. Actors/stunt players should NOT "dry" fire or operate charging mechanisms until told to do so by a production authority.

RUBBER WEAPONS

Rubber weapons, which cost between \$150 and \$300 a piece in 1995 were designed to be carried by stunt persons during falls and fight scenes. Most rubber guns look like the real thing. Treat them with the same respect you would a real firearm. Sure, it's fun to "fast draw" these props or point them at your buddy, but think of how others around you view this activity. The image you portray on the set is the image others rely on when considering you for possible future work.

WHAT ACTUALLY OCCURS WHEN A WEAPON IS FIRED

BLANK DISCHARGE

1. The trigger is depressed and the hammer is released to strike a firing pin.
2. The pin moves with enough velocity forward into the cylinder of a revolver, breach of a pistol, shotgun, or the receiver of " machine gun or assault weapon.
3. The pin strikes the rear of the blank charge.
4. The primer ignites the powder inside the cartridge and burning begins.
5. As a gas generated inside the cartridge expands, as part of the burn it forces out wadding in revolver and shotgun blanks. It forces open the crimp of semi-auto pistols and assault weapon blanks.
6. This gas continues burning and expanding as it enters the barrel. In some semiautomatic and full automatic weapons, some gas is diverted to recycle the bolt and discharge the expended blank. In other semiautomatic and automatic weapons, a restrictor is machined in the barrel to restrict gas back to operate the bolt and extraction process. In revolvers, pump action shotguns, breach or receiver fed shotguns and bolt action rifles, all the gas leaves the end of the barrel with paper or cardboard wadding, and other particles.

How Far Away IS Safe?

As described previously, the release of burning gas, blank wadding materials and brass particles from the crimp are elements of possible injury. There are so many variations of firearms and combinations of blanks used that we would need volumes to describe all the possibilities. Common sense must be used. Some of the blank ammunition boxes have disclaimers that state, "unsafe within 20 feet." This is the manufacturer's "safe" distance. Often the action being filmed calls for shots to be fired within 5 to 10 feet of another actor/stunt player. It is my suggestion to NEVER exceed the manufacturers recommendations printed on the box containing the blanks.

A safe check procedure or test fire display could demonstrate a safe distance for a discharge. Set up a "C" stand with an arm out and hang a piece of tissue paper from it. Stand back at the distance the director wants and discharge the weapon. Upon firing, if the tissue paper is shattered apart, step back a few feet. Finally, of course, you will "cheat" the weapon by actually firing the weapon away from the other actor/stunt player.

NEVER, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE AIM OR SHOOT TOWARD THE HEAD AND FACE OF ANOTHER PERSON. THE WEAPON SHOULD ALWAYS BE "CHEATED" AWAY.

"Common sense" guidelines should be understood and practiced by the prop master/weapons handler. He or she *should*:

1. Instruct actors/stunt players in the proper use and function of the firearm they will be operating. Some actors have never before used a firearm. It is up to the handler/prop person to get everyone up to speed. If the handler cannot properly train an actor or stunt player to operate a firearm, he/she must inform the director or assistant director that a problem exists and make the necessary adjustments.
2. Have current and valid licenses or permits and be qualified to work with the firearms in possession and operation, whether the firearms are privately owned or company rented.
3. As the responsible party for distributing the firearms on the set, be sure that no one else is distributing any firearms. If it is necessary for another person to assist in the distribution of firearms, the prop master or weapons handler assumes the responsibility of making sure the assistant is qualified.

4. Inspect the firearm's cylinder, breach, receiver and barrel for any contamination before loading any blanks.
5. Only load the firearms prior to actual use for filming.
6. Make people aware that firearms are being loaded when installing the blanks, and allow actors/stunt players involved with the firing of the said firearm to watch the loading process if they desire.

When the "big scene" calls for a plethora of operation firearms, it is my suggestion to pace yourself in the following ways:

1. Have a walk through and safety meeting before production.
2. Determine which firearms are most reliable, and have those placed closest to the camera.
3. Discuss with actors/stunt players the usual safety procedures you practice with regard to firearms. No harm in checking everyone a second time one-on-one.
4. Instruct the director or assistant director about safe zones of fire; i.e. brass, gas and wading.
5. Ask the director or assistant director as to their wishes in case of firearm malfunction during filming:
 - A. Have the actor/stunt player continue with the scene, with his/her finger in "ready" position, OR
 - B. Have the actor stop and announce, "Dud" or "Stop."
6. Make sure everyone has the same message as to the possibility of malfunction. Chances are there may be a pyrotechnic special effect going on in the scene and you will only have one chance to "get it."
Remember to **PRACTICE COMMON SENSE.**
7. When the weapons handler prop master hears, "Cut!" after the "big scene" or when there is a malfunction of a firearm, he/she should retrieve the malfunctioning firearm first, then the others in the predetermined order.

DO NOT PERMIT ANY ACTOR/STUNT PLAYER TO TRY TO REPAIR A MALFUNCTIONING FIREARM.

GLOSSARY

Ammo

An abbreviated term for ammunition, which is an object that is propelled out of a gun. a.k.a. round or bullet.

Assault Weapon

A type of gun which discharges each time the trigger is activated.

Barrel Restriction

Metal fittings secured inside or out of a barrel to restrict gas to operate the bolt or eject brass.

B.F.A.

Used by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms to describe weapons used in the entertainment industry - Blank Fire Adapted.

Blank

Term for a round or cartridge during burning or ignition and not a bullet.

Bolt

That part of a gun which takes a round forward into the receiver for discharge and then brings the spent round's brass back for ejection.

Brass

The metal most often used as the case or cartridge of a blank or bullet.

Centerfire

Bullet or blank that discharges when struck in the rear and center

Charge

Often refers to a blank round of ammunition. Also reference to the act of injecting a round into the receiver.

DAG

A brand of blank ammunition that is manufactured in Germany that uses a plastic lip.

Discharge

To shoot, or to fire, or to release a round or blank from a gun.

Dummy Round

A round that looks real to camera but is "inert" (i.e. no powders or primers).

Firearm

General term for a gun which includes revolvers, pistols, shotguns, and rifles.

Flash Suppressor

A fixture that limits by dispersion, the amount of flash that is visible coming out of the barrel when the gun is fired.

Foamies

A general term for foam inserts placed into the ears to reduce the decibels of noise. a.k.a. "ear plugs"

Full Auto

A gun that fires continuously with one pull of the trigger and continues firing until the magazine is empty, or trigger is released.

Gun

Usually a metal device that emits a bullet when operated by firing mechanisms within.

Pistol

A gun usually held in one hand that fires semiautomatic.

Revolver

A gun which contains a cylinder that rotates inside the frame to present a blank or bullet for the firing pin to strike.

Safety

On a gun, a device that is supposed to render the gun inoperable.
DON'T DEPEND ON THEM.

Setaquette

A slang word used to describe a person's behavior on a movie set. (etiquette)

Semi-Auto

Pistols and assault weapons that discharge each time the trigger is pulled. One pull, one shot, until the magazine is empty.

Shotgun

A gun that releases lead or steel pellets in a group instead of a bullet.

Weapon

General term that includes all guns as a group.