

SAFETY MOMENT



Use of Firearms and Projectiles on Set

Who needs to read this?

All Curtin University Arts Staff, Students and Contractors who may be required to use firearms and/or projectiles during film or theatre productions.

Background

From 1990 to 2021 there were at least 43 actors and/or stunt people in America die and 150 who were seriously injured on film or theatre set accidents. In comparison, Australia wide there were 21 deaths in the Arts and Recreation industries from 2018 to the end of 2022. A number these incidents in both countries involved firearms or prop/imitation guns and ammunition or projectiles.

The most recent high profile case involved the actor Alec Baldwin. In this instance, as a producer and actor within the movie "Rust" he has been charged with involuntary manslaughter related to at least 12 acts or omissions of recklessness and dangerous acts prior to 12pm on the day of the incident. The armourer for the film was also charged with involuntary manslaughter.

An Australian case occurred in Queensland in 2017. In this instance stuntman Johann Ofner died during the filming of a music clip in a Brisbane bar. The Coroner found that the armourer supplied an illegal weapon (a home-made sawn-off shotgun) and ammunition (these did not contain steel projectiles, but still had ignition powder, cloth wadding and a plastic casing) to the site. The stuntman died as a result of the transmitted force from being shot in the chest with a projectile that resulted in heart failure. Had the armourer not died of natural causes in August 2017, he would have faced criminal charges.

Other high profile cases include the death of Brandon Lee by a prop gun on the set of "The Crow" in 1993 and Jon-Erik Hexum in 1984 on the set of "Cover Up", where he shot himself in the head with a gun loaded with blanks.

Information

This highlights the need for stringent processes to be in place prior to the use of firearms, projectiles and other props which may transmit force. In the Queensland case the Coroner identified four failures that lead to Mr Ofner's death, these being:

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- Not under-taking a firearm safety briefing
- Not testing the firearm to establish safe distances
- Failing to consider more costly and safer production options
- Not realising there were aiming difficulties associated with firing from the hip

Key Messages

It is therefore essential that all people on set follow the 4 international safety rules in relation to firearm safety:

1. Treat firearms as loaded at all times
2. Always point the firearm in a safe direction to minimise property damage, injury and loss of life
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until you make a conscious decision to shoot
4. Identify your target and the surroundings to prevent unintended consequences

For more information please review the following documents as a minimum: Screen Safety Australia - High Risk productions, the National Guidelines for Screen Safety before completing all preproduction requirements as outlined by your Faculty.

Who do you call with questions?

If you have any queries, please contact Health and Safety on 9266 4900 or email healthandsafety@curtin.edu.au.

References

[National Firearms Safety Code 2002](#)

[National Guidelines for Screen Safety February 2022](#)

[Screen Safety Australia – High Risk Production Activities](#)

[Work related traumatic injury fatalities report 2019](#)

[Work related traumatic injury fatalities report 2011-12 to 2020-21](#)

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-25/qld-inquest-stuntman-death-prop-gun-gold-coast-johann-ofner/100780232>

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