

Safety on Set

Safety should be the first concern of every crew member involved in a film shoot. The equipment used in production can be particularly dangerous and the haste and improvisation which are in the very nature of the filmmaking process puts individuals at even greater risk unless they are conscientious of safety at every moment. Unfortunately, failure to observe safety policies results in serious injury and even the death of crew members all too often. On the other hand, crew members who practice good safety procedures not only keep themselves and their fellow crew members safe, but also develop strong reputations for professionalism.

Preparation

Safety begins long before the shooting day. It is the responsibility of each crew member to educate themselves about safety and to arrive on set on time, well rested, and healthy.

The Assistant Director

The AD, or Assistant Director, is the primary safety officer on the set, and this responsibility takes precedence above all the other things that the First Assistant Director does. The AD is responsible for the safe conduct of everyone involved in the production and will inform the crew about and enforce appropriate safety precautions. Any safety concerns should immediately be brought to the attention of the First Assistant Director.

The First Assistant Director has the sole authority to shut the production down if there is ever any indication, large or small, that the safety of anyone on the crew for any reason appears to be in jeopardy.

No one else on the crew, not the Director and not the Producer, has the authority to make the decision of whether or not a situation is safe enough to shoot. The First Assistant Director is solely responsible for making that determination, and must always err on the side of caution.

The Safety Meeting

The AD's first job at the beginning of every shooting day is to conduct a safety meeting with the entire crew present. New and returning crew members must be informed on a daily basis of the safety precautions for that day's shoot, including the locations of fire extinguishers, emergency exits, and the first aid kit, as well as any special issues pertaining to that day's shooting such as stunts to be performed or particularly hazardous rigging.

Proper Attire

The AD also checks that all crew members are in proper attire. It is particularly important that footwear be sturdy sneakers or boots. Sandals or high-heeled shoes of any kind are not permissible.

The AD also checks that all crew members wear well-fitting clothing that is appropriate to the weather, thin if it is hot, layered if it is cold, and waterproof if it is wet. No clothing should have excessive fringe or any loose pieces that could possibly get caught in equipment.

Crew members are responsible for bringing alternate clothing to change into should weather conditions change unexpectedly.

Working with an Equipment Truck

Particular care must be taken working around trucks. Use at least one spotter when maneuvering a truck in close quarters.

The contents of any truck may have shifted during travel. The door or doors should be opened slowly so that nothing can tumble out onto a crew member.

There is enough power in a lift gate to cause serious injury. Operation of the gate should be performed by one crew member at a time. The crew member operating the lift gate should always yell out a warning of "going up" or "going down" to alert nearby crew members to stay back from the moving lift gate. Crew members not operating the lift gate should stay at least five feet away during operation.

Moving Equipment

Move only an amount of equipment you can handle. Avoid carrying anything that could be moved on a cart. Use extra people to move large loads and be careful moving through narrow passages.

Power Distribution

The Best Boy Electric is responsible for all power distribution from on-set lighting to extension cords for craft services.

Cables should be run together out of foot traffic areas as much as possible. When cables must cross any area where they could present a tripping hazard for the rest of the crew, they must be secured with tape, heavy carpet, or rubber matting.

When using power on location, particular care must be taken not to overload circuits. In any case, only the Gaffer, the Best Boy Electric or an Electrician should ever plug in any cable or light.

Stands and Rigging

The Grips are responsible for all rigging, meaning anything that needs to be hung or put on a stand. This includes the setting of light stands. When carrying a stand, the warning “points coming through” should be yelled out so crew members can move out of the way of the possible hazard. All stands in use on the set must be sand-bagged according to their load or precariousness of their position.

C-stands must be set correctly. A C-stand’s arm is designed to extend over the knuckle with the load on the side toward which the knuckle tightens. This way, if the load forces the arm to slip, it will actually tighten and stop. If the rear of the C-Stand arm extends out beyond the base, a marker should be attached to it so that it can clearly be seen. This is true of any equipment or prop on set which sticks out and is particularly critical if something sticks out at eye-level.

Dollies

Grips are also responsible for the dolly. Once dolly tracks have been set, the crew must be careful not to trip on the tracks.

Heavy dollies should not be lifted, but ramped onto their tracks with wedges. Once on the track, the dolly should be prevented from rolling off the track with clamps

The Dolly Grip is the only crew member permitted to operate the dolly. Except during an actual take, the dolly grip must always warn those on and around the dolly before moving the dolly, yelling “dolly moves!” or “boom going up!” Crew members must always let the dolly group know their intention to mount or dismount the dolly before doing so, usually by saying “stepping on” or “stepping off”.

Nutrition and Hydration

Food and drinks should be available to crew members throughout the entire shoot. Craft services keeps a crew happy, but more importantly, crew members who lack energy or focus are a hazard on set.

Snacks should include fruits and vegetables as well as snack bars and candy bars. Drinks should offer both caffeinated and decaffeinated options.

Working with Talent

Particular care must be taken with talent. Actors should not be expected to be as aware of the possible hazards on a set as crew members. It is the AD’s responsibility to get the actors to the set and make them aware of any hazards.

If child actors or animals are on set, they must have a crew member assigned to watch them at all times. For Advanced Productions, a Studio Teacher must be hired anytime a child actor is on set.

During the Shoot

As shooting begins, the entire crew needs to stay aware of possible hazards. Any possible safety concern should be reported to the AD promptly.

Watch out for burning smells, trip hazards, clear paths to fire exits, damaged equipment, or unsafe behavior by crew members or talent.

Late arriving crew members must be briefed individually on safety by the AD.

Fire, Stunts, and Firearms

Candles and cigarettes should be handled with great care on a set. Any larger fire used on set, even a large group of candles, must be supervised by a paid Fire Marshal.

All stunts should be planned by a professional. Crew members need to be made aware of all aspects of any stunt before it is executed, and should watch for related hazards.

If weapons of any kind, including guns, swords, and knives are to be used on a production, local law enforcement must be notified, even if the weapons are non-functioning replicas to be used on a closed set.

The use of functioning firearms, even with blanks, should be avoided. Remember, realistic muzzle flash can very easily be added in post. Functioning firearms must be handled by a professional. The weapons specialist must only allow the actor whose part requires handling the weapon to handle the weapon during actual filming, and no one else should ever handle the weapon. When not in use, weapons should be stored in a locked location. This goes for replicas or functioning firearms.

Driving Shots

Any shot sequences that involve moving vehicles must be approved planned for in advanced in a way that assures their safety. A process trailer should be used in cases where actors cannot safely operate a motor vehicle at the same time they are focused on delivering a performance. Local law enforcement must be made aware of any situations involving the shooting of moving vehicles on public streets and in some case may need to restrict traffic in the shooting area.

Meal Breaks

A meal must always be served no more than six hours after crew call. All meals should be nutritionally balanced, and enough must be provided for the entire crew and cast. Everyone in the cast and crew should get at least half an hour to eat.

Company Moves

Should it be necessary to change locations in the middle of a shooting day, the company move must be handled carefully in spite of the temptation to rush to the next location. A safety meeting must be held at the new location before filming resumes.

Even for a short move, all equipment should be stowed securely in the production vehicles.

Shooting Outdoors

Film shoots always attract the curious. Particularly when outside, the crew needs to watch out for individuals who are not part of the film shoot and keep them clear of all equipment and the shooting area in general. Report anyone who does not belong on the set to the AD.

Shooting should not occur on public or private roads open to traffic. Contact local law enforcement or the property’s owners to close the area to traffic.

Under no circumstances should lights or rigging of any kind be set up anywhere near power lines or overhead lines of any kind.