

## **An Introduction to Safety on Set**

Production sets create potentially dangerous situations, including the potential for electrocution, burns, cuts, bruises, and fires. In recent years, fatal injuries at other Universities have turned more attention to issues of safety on student productions.

Safety issues during production should be addressed during ALL phases of a film, video, or television production, from the script, through the location scout, to construction, and into production itself. Make sure you speak up if you think something is unsafe. If you find that anyone has to argue over whether or not something is safe, then it probably is not. It is never a waste of time to stop and rethink a situation to avoid a potential disaster.

In addition there is always a creative way to avoid a dangerous situation. Thinking creatively about how to use film technique to simulate dramatic events is part of the challenge for any filmmaker.

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR SAFETY ON-SET?**

No safety program or set of rules or regulations can cover all possible unsafe acts or situations. Following the recommendations in this document DOES NOT mean you will not experience safety issues on set and reading/following this document DOES NOT absolve the production team of responsibility for safety on-set. Ultimately, it is up to you to work safely, to prevent accidents, and to avoid injury to yourself and your cast and crew. The best time to identify a safety issue is BEFORE someone gets hurt! This can be accomplished by being SAFE:

Scan your surroundings.

Assess the potential risks and hazards.

Find out more about any possible dangers.

Ensure the proper safe behavior of all members of a production.

Never work alone in a potentially hazardous situation. A cinematography student at NYU was killed when he stepped off a roof while shooting. A spotter or “buddy system” would have avoided his senseless death.

Never operate equipment or perform a task for which you have not been properly trained.

Members of a production crew may only work on-set if they are properly prepared with the appropriate safety equipment. This includes:

- 1) Protective footwear – 1-inch rubber soled shoes are recommended. ABSOLUTELY NO FLIP FLOPS or open toed shoes are allowed on sets.
- 2) Gloves – thick leather work gloves are part of every light kit available from SAC or ISS. Use them when working with or adjusting lighting equipment.
- 3) Clothing appropriate to the existing climate and weather conditions is also crucial. Check the weather report prior to any shoot.

### **PLANNING FOR SAFETY:**

The safest and most productive shoots are the result of careful planning and preparation. A tech/location scout will make or break your production and is vital for the safe running of your project. Things to consider:

- 1) Is the location safe for the crew/cast? Are there potential hazards?
- 2) Are the power requirements of your location safe and sufficient for your needs?
- 3) Can you enter and exit the location quickly? Is there an alternate exit?
- 4) Can you park safely and load and unload any necessary vehicles at the location?
- 5) Are there sprinkler systems, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, fire alarms, etc? Disabling any of these systems is unlawful and extremely dangerous.
- 6) How close is the nearest medical facility or hospital?

### **WORKING WITH LIGHTING AND ELECTRICITY:**

- Never touch a lighting instrument bulb, even when cool, with your bare hands. The oil from your fingers creates a hot spot on the bulb to which heat migrates, potentially causing bulbs to shatter.
- Lighting instruments get VERY HOT QUICKLY and can cause severe burns. Always use the heavy gloves provided when working with lighting equipment.
- Never use materials as gels in front of lights not rated or designed to withstand high heat.
- Never position a light too close to a surface, such as a wall. The heat may melt the surface and start a fire.
- If you smell rubber melting or wires burning, stop the shoot until you have discovered and fixed the cause.

- DO NOT operate exterior lighting in wet/rainy conditions or where it could accidentally come in contact with water such as pools, rivers and lakes.
- Exterior light stands should be heavily weighted with shot/sand bags. Stands over 8 feet tall should be staked down with guide ropes and should NOT be used in high wind conditions.
- Be aware of power availability. Check for the location circuit breaker box during the tech scout to make sure fuses are not blown or tripped by your instruments. Do not count on the circuit breaker box to definitively protect the wiring of your location.
- Avoid overloading an outlet. Do not plug lights into an extension cord unless they are rated for such use. NEVER break off the three-prong ground to fit a three-prong power cable into a two-prong outlet.
- Avoid piles of cables and keep some slack at the head of a unit to avoid the unit being accidentally pulled over.
- Rubber matting and/or gaffer tape should be used to keep high traffic areas safe from cast and crew tripping over cables. Use tape that will not pull finish off surfaces when removed. Do not stand on cables.

**BE AWARE OF THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF YOUR SET ON OTHERS:**

- As noted above, use appropriate gaffer tape to tape down all cables crossing “traffic” areas.
- If shooting in or near roads or other potentially hazardous locations such as train tracks, you must have the necessary permissions (from the company or companies that own the rail lines, for example). Always employ several members on your production team to watch for and warn of traffic in both directions near any shooting location.
- UM policy strictly prohibits the use of weapons and simulated weapons or violence on all campus locations. If you intend to use simulated weapons or violence on any off-campus location, you MUST alert the Ann Arbor Police Department and follow the SAC Department procedures for gaining permission to use simulated weapons.

**A NOTE ABOUT SLEEP DEPRIVATION AND OTHER FACTORS:**

Long hours without sleep are a reality in the lives of students, and particularly production students. Sleep deprivation is as mind-altering as heavy drinking and drug use. Professional sets have rules about the number of hours permitted for shooting and the turnaround between shoots. Long commutes to distant sets add to the potential for dangerous driving conditions after long days of shooting. If at all possible, plan your shooting schedule over several shoots of shorter duration. Rushing on set is never a good idea and overly long days can often result in poor decision-making and ultimately, re-shoots. The use of drugs and alcohol on set (or prior to production) is strictly prohibited.

**WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT OR EMERGENCY:**

The production team on any shoot should have simple first-aid supplies (Band-aids, burn cream) on-hand.

If the injury needs attention but is not life threatening, seek medical attention at a hospital emergency room.

If someone is more seriously injured, seek immediate medical attention by calling 911. If you are not sure of the seriousness of the injury, err on the side of caution and get the injured person to the hospital immediately. If an accident does occur while shooting on campus, contact the UM Office of Public Safety.

As soon as possible, inform your instructor and/or the SAC Department (734-764-0147). With the SAC Department’s assistance, contact UM Risk Management to file an insurance claim. Provide a detailed description of the incident (using incident report sheets available from the SAC equipment room) along with copies of all paperwork. Keep all copies of police reports and/or bills for emergency rooms and hospital visits.

(This information has been adapted from the Kanbar Intitute of Film and Television Safety Handbook, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Used with the permission of Ted Wachs)

**LIABILITY AND INSURANCE:**

When you are making media for a course you are enrolled in, the University provides basic Liability insurance for you and UofM equipment. However, anyone who is NOT a UofM student, staff or faculty is NOT covered. This means that YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE for and damages or injuries they incur, even if they were not invited on set. The same is true for personal (non-UfoM) equipment. If you intend to have non-UfoM people on your set (actors, extras, or crew) you must purchase Liability Insurance. Please contact Mary Lou Chlipala [mlouisa@umich.edu](mailto:mlouisa@umich.edu) in the SAC office for details.