

**THIS ABOVE ALL ELSE:  
THE NUMBER ONE RULE IN USING PROP WEAPONRY**  
*Never allow these weapons to be used or even  
seen outside of a controlled rehearsal or  
performance space.*

Do not use any prop weapon for "improves"  
Do not use any prop weapon for "promotional events"  
Do not use any prop weapon within sight of the general public  
actors have been shot by neighborhood "heroes" for rehearsing in public with rubber knives;  
actors have been arrested for making violent gestures in public with rubber guns;  
actors have been killed while holding very phony looking prop weapons

The general group;

Never play with a gun, real or not. Cops/others do not know that it is not real, if it looks real they may do something everyone will regret.

Blank guns are just as dangerous as real guns. More people in theater and the movies have been killed by playing with "safe" blank guns than with real guns.

Just like other props, they are meant only for the person using it, only if you do something to this prop you could cause someone to be seriously hurt.

Demonstrate the prop, include ejecta path of sparks and any wadding especially to people who know gun safety as the side danger zone is not what they know.

SM, Director, other faculty staff,

Explain the safety procedures to be used.

Offer to take them through the full weapon training if they wish

Reiterate again that they need to lead by example that playing with the prop is unacceptable.

Give them a list with train of custody for each prop and explain that if that train is not followed the prop should not be used

Give them information about campus police

Actor, Stage hands touching prop;

Specifically go through the process of gun safety, never actually point at some one, always up-stage, make sure area around gun is clear before firing, etc

Demonstrate the process of loading and checking the load of the gun, impress that this should be done each and every time the prop changes hands

Demonstrate the cleaning of the gun, impress that this must be done each time the gun is fired

Allow actors and stagehands to fire the weapon so they get used to the feel and sound

Observe all go through all the above process at least twice to ensure that they are comfortable and knowledgeable of them

Again emphasize that the prop is not a toy and a cop won't know the difference

Give actor/stagehand access to the locked area that the prop is stored in.



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For your own peace of mind, always have a back-up sound ready.

## **Safety Warning: PERCUSSION FIREARMS**

Eye and ear protection should be worn when firing a percussion firearm. When using, always fire with arm fully extended and at a safe distance from any other person. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction before, during, and after firing. **NEVER** point any firearm at any person or animal. Blank loads are just as deadly as a bullet.

In the event that blackpowder has been loaded, but upon firing there is no discharge, remove the weapon from the stage, barrel pointing up, and leave it in a restricted area for at least three minutes. Embers may still be smoldering within the charge and can ignite the charge at any time. At the end of this cooling down period, fill the barrel with cold water before attempting to unload the charge.

Neither the manufacturer nor Weapons of Choice, nor any representative thereof, can accept any responsibility for injury or damage or any destruction arising from intentional or accidental use of this model. Persons not qualified to do so should not disassemble this weapon.

### **GUN SAFETY BASICS:**

- Always unload when finished handling
- Never rely on a "safety" to prevent accidental discharge
- Never leave a firearm unattended or not in your direct control
- Insure that the blast from the firearm is clear of all objects, living things, or flammable material
- Never carry a firearm with the hammer cocked
- Always assume that any weapon you see is real, white-hot, loaded and deadly
- Do not dry-fire any weapon, even pure props. It severely damages the gun

All weapons must be cleaned and lubricated after every performance. Failure to do so puts the user at great peril and leads to the destruction of the firearm.

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE**

The following is made in lieu of all warranties, express or implied. Neither the manufacturer nor provider shall be liable for any injury, loss or damage, direct or consequential, arising out of the use or misuse of the product. Before using, user shall determine the suitability of the product for the intended use, the suitability of the materials and methods employed in use, and the suitability of circumstances under which the product is used, and the user assumes all risk and liability whatsoever in connection therewith. The foregoing may not be changed except by an agreement signed by the officers of both manufacturer and provider. Manufacturer and provider have no control of and deny any fault in case of accident or injury.

## operating the percussion firearm

The percussion cap blackpowder gun was the most common form of firearm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The increased reliability compared to the earlier flintlock mechanism ensured its widespread use among both military and civilian shooters soon after its development in the early 1800's.

The principle is very simple. When an explosive compound is ignited in a confined are with one opening, anything between the explosion and the opening (ball or bullet) is going to fly out with a heck of a lot of speed and force. So, you pour some blackpowder down the barrel of the gun, cover a ball with a patch of wadding, and slide the ball down the barrel with a rod until it fits snugly against the powder. The only problem is how to set off tat explosive charge exactly when you want to.

The percussion cap is a relatively safe way of doing just that. The cap (usually made of copper or aluminum0 is coated on its inside with a quick igniting detonating compound. This is placed over a hollow nipple, which is connected to a vent that leads right to the blackpowder in the barrel. On pressing the trigger, the hammer strikes the cap, crushing the compound against the end of the nipple. The resulting flash travels down the nipple to the vent to the blackpowder in the barrel. Then it goes boom.



Since the cap has a detonating charge, some theatres use only that for the sound of gunfire. Simply pull the hammer back to half-cock (one click), place the cap over the nipple, press it in snugly, and then pull the hammer back again as you depress the trigger, then gently lower the hammer down on the cap. To fire the gun, pull the hammer back to full-cock (two clicks), and then depress the trigger. Practice once or twice with just a cap until it makes sense. Caps have a low rate of misfire, but it is always prudent to have someone ready offstage with a back-up sound.

**NOTE:** With the hammer resting on the cap, any sudden pressure against the hammer can accidentally fire the cap, so the prudent thing to do is to leave the hammer at half cock as a safety. But then there is no pressure against the cap, so it can easily fall off while the actor moves about on stage. Which is worse: risking an accidental discharge or risking no shot at all? Your choice, I'm afraid.

If you need more sound and fury, a small amount of blackpowder may be poured into the barrel (start with one teaspoon), firmly pack with a ramrod, and then slide in a small bit of wadding (magician's flash paper is best, but a sheet of toilet paper will do) down the barrel to hold the charge in place. Do not "ram-pack" the wad. They do that in the movies, but that will cause an explosion instead of a fast burn, which is what you want. Instead, push and tap the wad several times. The idea is to make sure that it is snug and to remove any air pockets around the powder. The last step is to put the cap on the nipple, and then you're ready to go. Make sure that the area in front of and extending 30 degrees from the barrel is clear of all people, animals, and flammable material at all times before, during, and after the shot. All state, federal and local laws concerning the use of blackpowder and explosive devices must be observed, as should all the rules of common sense. Remember that people have died from being hit by "blank" loads.

When blackpowder is used, the barrel must be cleaned after each performance, or the gun will simply corrode away. Even if the gun is not fired, periodic spraying with WD-40 is an excellent way of preventing damage.

I always advise never actually pointing any weapon at anyone at any time. This goes for real guns, blank guns, toy guns, swords, knives, rubber chickens, any weapon, any time, anywhere. The depth perception limits of the audience allow for a little upstage cheating, and I think it's important for actors to receive consistent instruction (tongue-lashings) wherever they work so as to avoid Jon-Erik Hexum and Brandon Lee type fatalities.

## cleaning the percussion firearm

The residue from explosive materials used in blank or percussive charges is extremely corrosive to the internal workings of the weapon; so let me remind you that all discharged weapons must be thoroughly cleaned within 12 hours of having been fired. Failure to do so will cause misfires, improper movement of working parts, and puts the user of the weapon at great risk of serious injury. Just as when you operate a car you are responsible for filling it with oil and water, it is the theater's responsibility to ensure that all weapons are cleaned, lubricated, and protected from damage.

After each performance or rehearsal, first inspect the weapon for any obvious signs of damage as you unload the weapon "But I didn't load the gun for this rehearsal". **Always assume that somehow, someone has loaded the gun since the last time you held it.** After unloading, take an old stiff toothbrush and scrape away any powder you see. If you spot any rust, sand it off with some worn emery cloth or fine steel wool.

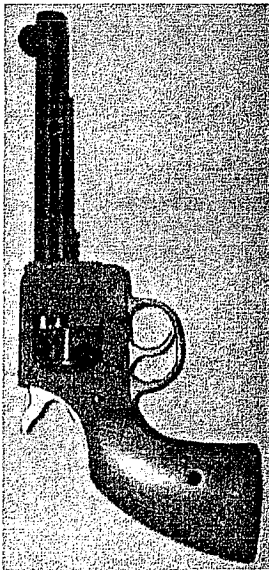
If blackpowder has been fired, you will need to clean the barrel, which can be removed from the stock, but this is not mandatory. There are many gun cleaning solutions on the market, but soapy water works better than any of them. Use some cloth patches or a bit of sponge or old rag, connect it to a stiff wire or rod, and run it up and down the inside of the barrel with plenty of soapy water. Some water will squirt majestically out of the nipple, which is good because it means that the vent is not plugged and that it is getting clean as well. Keep checking the rags or sponge; when it comes out clean, you are ready to lube. If you feel mechanically inclined remove the side plates and spray the mechanism with WD-40.

Change the wet rag to a dry one and spray plenty of WD-40 on it (or any light machine oil). Run it up and down just as you did with the soapy water. If you think there are any spots that still might have some water it, go ahead and spray some more WD-40. Spray it everywhere - when in doubt, spray some more: too much is good. it will loosen rust, push away the residue, lubricate the moving parts, displace any hidden water, and generally make life more pleasant. Reassemble the weapon, wipe down the outside, and you are ready for the next performance.

# "How Loud Should That Gunshot Be?"

Heated words are exchanged ... a gun is pulled out of a jacket pocket ... a shot rings out! ... and then the audience can't hear the next five minutes of dialogue because of the ringing in their ears. How do you know what blanks to use when you need an on- or offstage gunshot?

Although it may sound strange coming from a company that makes its money in part by selling blanks, the best sound effect for a gunshot comes not from a gun at all but from your sound board. Of course not your old reel-to-reel or cassette player. Taped sound is hard to cue-up and is unforgiving if there is any technical glitch. No, I'm talking about a good modern sound system that accepts an exact cue search from a CD. Such a sound can be generated at the sound operator's touch whenever it is required, at exactly the right



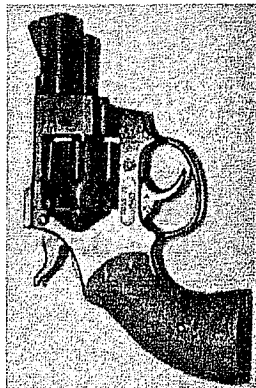
volume, and no danger to the actors. A good designer can make the gunshot appear to come from any point on-stage or off.

If, however, the choice is made to use an actual or live gunshot for the effect, please remember that less is more. Some directors and fight choreographers want very loud gunshots for nearly every show, so please remind them that audiences need the *impression* of gunfire, not the real thing. As a matter of fact, most audiences prefer not to be deafened in order to experience verisimilitude. So what caliber should you use?

A brief explanation of caliber: it is a number which describes the width of a charge or bullet. In the English or American system, it is listed in the hundredths of an inch diameter measurement of the inside of the gun barrel. So 22 caliber is a little less than 1/4 of an inch wide, 38 caliber is a little more than 1/3 of an inch wide, etc. Metric measurement are the same except listed in millimeters. Some rough loudness equivalents follow, but remember that guns are made for usually only one kind of charge, English or Metric, but not both:

22 caliber	=	6mm
32 caliber	=	8mm
38 caliber	=	9mm
45 caliber	=	12mm

Caliber describes the diameter, not the area, so all things being equal a 32 caliber blank



is not 50% louder, but over twice as loud as a 22 caliber blank. What the caliber also fails to tell you is how long the blank is, so it tells you nothing about the volume of powder. Ammunition manufactures can make a blank as long as they wish, and filled with as much gunpowder as they wish. For this reason, 32 caliber blanks are actually *over four times* as loud as 22 caliber blanks.

Some blanks come in volumes reduced from standard, and are called either half-loads or quarter-loads, but the standard volume can change with each manufacturer, so you have to know what the standard is for that particular

brand of blank at that caliber before you can guess at what the half load will sound like.

For most theatres, 22 caliber blanks are all you are going to need. This is good because they are the least expensive. There are three commonly found 22 blanks available nationwide and they have very different sound characteristics. The 6mm Precise brand (yes, they will fit in a 22 handgun) are about as wide as they are long, come 100 to a canister, and look like tiny little acorns. They produce the least amount of sound you can get in a commercial blank because there just isn't much room for much gunpowder. This is about as much sound as you can get away with in 50 to 150 seat houses, especially if the first row is close to the actors. The one drawback is the quality of the sound produced - it has only high register notes so tends to sound "tinny".



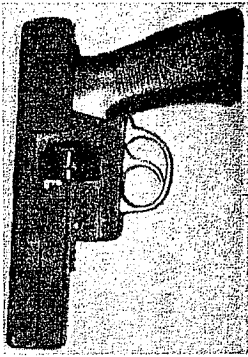
The CCI brand 22's come in boxes of 100, but are about twice as tall as the Precise, so produce a deeper and louder sound. From 100 to 500 seats, this will give a reasonably effective gunshot.

The Winchester brand blanks come 50 to a box and use not modern gunpowder but old-fashioned blackpowder. This gives a wonderfully rich sound with deep resonance and leaves a nice cloud of smoke hanging around the gun for a few minutes. From 200 to 800 seats or more, this is an excellent effect.

When a very strong sound is required, obviously the higher calibers can provide enough

noise to simulate cannon-fire even in a 2000 seat outdoor amphitheater. One thing doesn't change: more sound means more powder burning and creating very hot gasses leaving the gun.

If a gun is chambered for let's say 45 caliber, it can use only 45 caliber, but can fire effectively with a half or quarter load (or even just the primer with no powder at all) of that same caliber - with one important exception. Semi-automatic pistols and their blank-fire stage equivalents (8mm) require a full-load in order to bring up the second blank automatically. Reducing the amount of gunpowder in the blank by even a small amount will mean that the gun will fire only once and then have to be reloaded manually for each subsequent shot. For several shots from a semi-auto, it's full load or nothing. And full load from an 8mm in a small house is simply too much sound.



An exception to that are replicas made with a 22 caliber starter inside (the picture above). It looks close enough like a semi-auto, but since it is really a revolver, it can fire full, half or quarter loads without difficulty.

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## Weapons Safety

If weapons are to be used in the show you must talk to the Technical Director before they are put onstage about training for the actor and stage hands handling the props as well as general training for the entire cast and crew.

Some general rules that must be followed whenever weapons are to be used on stage.

- Weapons must be locked up at ALL TIMES when not being used.
- The only people who should touch the weapon is the actor using it, a crew member (if necessary) that is assisting the actor with the weapon offstage and the Stage Manager who will get it from its locked location and return it there after the show.
- Weapons should NEVER be taken outside of the rehearsal/performance space. People outside of the theatre will not know this is a toy or prop. People have been shot by police for pointing fake guns at them because the police were unable to tell the difference.
- Blank guns are just as dangerous as real guns. More people in theatre have been killed by playing with "safe" blank guns than real guns.
- Actors should always check their props. This is ESPECIALLY necessary for weapons. Recently an actor was almost killed when a prop knife was broken and had to be replaced. The new knife was not dulled down properly and the actor did not check it and when the action called for him to slit his throat he accidentally cut his throat open.
- When using a gun onstage (no matter what kind) NEVER point it at another person. The director MUST take into account with blocking that the gun MUST be pointed upstage or to the left or right of the actor that is supposed to be "shot". This includes training crew to not be in the line of fire in the wings. No one should stand directly next to a gun either, as discharge from the sides of guns has been known to happen.

## Firearm Safety

### Treat every gun as if were loaded

**Never point a gun at something you do not intend to destroy.**

#### Prop- Gun Procedures for Revolvers

##### **Safety Check:**

- Point weapon in a safe direction
- If handing the weapon to another person always give them the handle of the weapon with the muzzle pointed down.
- Push cylinder release forward and swing cylinder out.
- Look in chamber to make sure it isn't loaded or obstructed.
- Look in barrel to make sure it is clear of any obstruction.
- **NEVER** insert anything in the barrel.

##### **Loading:**

- Load each cylinder with eight blank rounds (brass-colored)
- Check each round to make sure that is hasn't been spent
- Close cylinder

##### **Firing:**

- Do not point weapon at another person
- There must be **AT LEAST SIX FEET** between muzzle of weapon and any body part.
- Squeeze trigger to fire round.
- After firing desired rounds, place weapon in a secure location

##### **Unloading:**

- Point weapon in a safe direction
- Push cylinder release and swing cylinder out.
- Tilt barrel up and take out unspent rounds.
- Look in each chamber to make sure they are clear.
- Look in the barrel to make sure it is clear.
- After a use please lock weapon with a gunlock or in a locked container.

# GUN SAFETY

## High School Student Killed by Gun Loaded with Blanks

BY RON RANSOM

**L**AST NOVEMBER, JUST PRIOR to the final performance of "Oklahoma," 15 year-old Tucker Thayer shot himself in the head with a .38 caliber revolver at Desert Hills High School in St. George, Utah. Tucker was responsible for firing a gun offstage to mimic an actor firing a fake gun onstage. His parents report that he played with the gun before and after the play and that on numerous occasions, students complained that Tucker was pointing the gun at them and at himself.

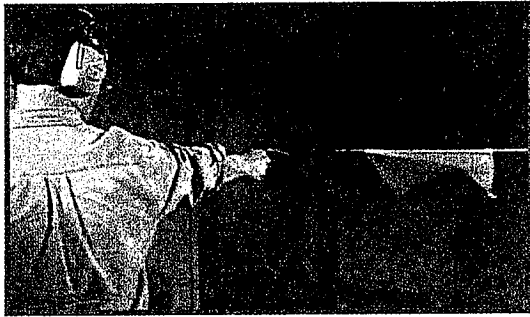


PHOTO: THEATRE ARTS VIDEO LIBRARY

*Theatre weapons expert Robert B. Chambers, host of the DVD "Firearm Safety Onstage," conducts a blank penetration test to determine the explosive power of a gunshot*

At press time, the accident is still being investigated by the St. George Police Department.

This is an unfortunate mistake and our sincere condolences go out to the family and friends of Tucker Thayer. The awful question remains on why a starter pistol was not used for the effect in "Oklahoma."

Tragically this is not the only death due to "blanks" being used in live-firing-guns. Among them, Brandon Lee was killed on the movie set of "The Crow," and in 1984, soap opera star, Jon-Erik Hexum, died after he put a gun loaded with blanks to his head and pulled the trigger.

### A BLANK FALLACY

There is a common and dangerous misconception surrounding the risk in using live-firing-guns shooting blanks. The key to this fatal misunderstanding lies in the false assumptions about blanks.

The real gun Tucker was using had blanks in the firing chambers instead of bullets. The term "blank" means "nothing" in most people's minds and they tend to transfer this meaning to the use of blanks in weapons.

The school thought the gun was safe because it was loaded with blanks. However, blank cartridges are the exact same thing as real bullets except the metal tip of the live bullet has been replaced with a piece of plastic or paper to keep the gunpowder inside the metal cartridge. There is still the same amount of gunpowder inside the blank cartridge. When the gun is fired, the gunpowder inside the cartridge explodes and sends whatever is at the tip of the cartridge out the front of the barrel...just like a real gun. It is in fact a real gun!

Many theatres use a plugged-barrel gun that does not allow anything to leave the front of the weapon. This equipment has its own problems since the explosion of the gunpowder leaves the weapon at a 90 degree angle from the firing chamber (out the sides or the top of the gun).


In the Tucker Thayer case, the explosion so near to his head caused the fatal accident. This could have been caused by the tremendous pressure of the gunpowder, or because he was hit by the plug, or perhaps both.

### GUN SAFETY

There are a number of safety actions that must be taken with the use of any firing weapon. All actors, technicians, stage managers and the director in the theatre must participate in these tests.

While these pointers are no substitute for a complete training program—here are some key points to keep people safer when using guns in the entertainment industry.

- Consider all weapons being used in rehearsal and performance as **LOADED** until they are proven otherwise.
- **TEST # 1:** On a stand, attach a white piece of paper next to and in contact with the side of the weapon. Wearing ear and eye protection fire the gun to see the **DISCHARGE PATTERN**. The discharge pattern tells the shooter how much gas and explosive powder come out the **side and front** of the weapon when it is fired.
- **TEST # 2:** Check each weapon to be used for **PENETRATION POWER**. What comes out the front of the barrel and how far does it travel? (See photo) Set up a large piece of paper on a stand and pick a reasonable distance between the shooter and the paper. Wearing ear and eye protection fire the gun at the paper. Is the paper blown back by the power of the explosion? Has the paper or plastic plug hit and penetrated the paper? Test and adjust as needed to see what distance works best to minimize the danger.
- These tests must be done even when using a plugged starter's pistol.
- A sober reminder: Using firing guns on stage is never completely safe.

There are many theatre productions requiring a gun be fired on or off-stage. Theatre students who migrate into TV and film production will most certainly run across productions using firing weapons. It's the American way. Training programs owe it to their students to teach them about how to use guns onstage safely. You owe it to your actors, staff and volunteers to ensure they are all fully trained in handling weapons safely. 

To read other stories on safety and training, visit the *DramaBiz Magazine Web site* at [www.dramabiz.com](http://www.dramabiz.com)

# SLOPPY PROP MANAGEMENT NEARLY KILLS ACTOR

BY RON RANSON



**W**HAT IS THE LAST THING YOU PROBABLY HEAR A DIRECTOR SAY TO THE CAST BEFORE a performance?

It is no doubt: "... have a great show, break a leg!—and check your props!"

This accident, sickly promoted on late-night talk shows as if it were an episode from *CSI*, is no laughing matter to those of us who work in theatre. On the contrary, it is a grim reminder to theatre workers that when handling certain props onstage lives are at stake.

While news reports varied greatly from the highly exaggerated to the boring—the basics of this story are these:

On December 6, 2008, 36-year-old Swedish born German actor Daniel Hoevls was performing the role of Marimier in a production of *Mary Stuart* at Vienna's Burgtheater. He had done this role before. The action calls for him to pull a knife and cut his own throat.

Instead of being given the regular stalled prop knife, a new and substitute knife was handed to Mr. Hoevls. Right on cue, Mr. Hoevls put the knife to his neck and slipped it across. Unfortunately, it was a real knife that had been handed to him. His own blood mixed with fake blood on his hand created an ultra-realistic suicide scene.


Some reports say the audience gasped at the realism and even applauded. Mr. Hoevls staggered onstage and was taken to a nearby hospital for treatment. (Thank goodness the Burgtheater has three full-time firemen/EMTs on duty – 24 hours a day.)

The Thalia Theatre (producers of the show) denied reports that the actor had a life-threatening incident, but Wolfgang Lewis, the treating doctor, said, "Just a little deeper and he would have been drowning in his own blood." Mr. Hoevls was stitched up, released, and was able to perform the same role the next night.

Rumors flew around the theatre community and in the press that there were "jealous rivalries" at work. The police focused instead on the severe negligence of the props department. At press time, there is still no word on what happened to the props crew.

The police report states that the regular knife was defective in some way and another knife was purchased locally. Instructions were given to a props person to dull the new knife. Evidently, the dulling procedure was forgotten. The police say the price tag was still stuck on the real knife.

All this leads to a couple of observations:

- Any knife, sword, rapier, spear and firing gun must be considered extremely dangerous and life threatening onstage. Actors (and crew) must take personal responsibility to make sure the weapon in question is in perfect working order.
- The need for strict professional discipline in highly dangerous stage action is demonstrated in the performance of actor Ben Affleck in the film *Shakespeare in Love*. Mr. Affleck was unable to be at the sword fight rehearsal that took place three MONTHS before it was actually shot on the set. When it came time to film the very realistic fight scenes for the camera, he was not allowed to use a sword as part of his action because he had not attended the rehearsal. In the film, he ends up hitting people with his fists and holding a tiny knife—that looks more like a letter opener. Good call by the film's safety officer and fight supervisor. 

## SAFETY TIPS FROM DRAMABIZ MAGAZINE:

**DIRECTORS & STAGE MANAGERS:** IF YOUR SHOW CONTAINS ANY weapon, fight or physical action where something can go wrong, mandate a warm up lead by a fight captain or fight supervisor. Equity stage managers are very strict about this procedure. A rehearsal of the suicide action in Vienna would have prevented this almost fatal accident.

**ACTORS:** You certainly need to trust your fellow company members, but **CHECK YOUR PROPS.**

# Blank-Firing Guns

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<http://www.props.eric-hart.com/safety/blank-firing-guns/>

October 18, 2010

On October 2, 2010, David Birrell was appearing in Stephen Sondheim's *Passion* at the Donmar Warehouse in London. During a performance, one of the blank-firing guns used apparently had a problem, and Birrell sustained an injury to his right eye. He may lose his sight in it. According to a spokeswoman for the theater, "It appears that during the duel scene in 'Passion,' David Birrell's licensed replica stage gun misfired causing some debris to enter his eye." Further sources claim it was actually an antique flintlock gun.

Accidents happen. Equipment malfunctions. Because blank-firing guns are so inherently dangerous, it is vital that even more attention is spent on following all the best practices of safety with them. I would go so far as to say that prop masters should not handle them: pyrotechnicians should handle the loading and handling of blank ammunition, experienced handlers should be in charge of selecting and maintaining the weapons, and skilled fight choreographers should block the scenes in which they are used. Of course, a prop master can also be a licensed pyrotechnician or be qualified to handle weapons (at the higher levels, many are); I am not saying being a prop master precludes one from using blank-firing guns, I am saying the title of "prop master" is not the sole prerequisite.

On April 15, 2010, Darrell D'Silva, an actor with the Royal Shakespeare Company was rehearsing a scene with a prop gun. He accidentally shot himself in the hand. It was during tech rehearsals for *Antony and Cleopatra*. He underwent surgery and returned to rehearsals with his arm in a sling. Apparently when it was handed to him, he thought it was unloaded. It took a big chunk off of his finger and blood spurted everywhere. Here is an incident where the accident came not from bad or malfunctioning equipment, but from bad communication. The actor was not told the gun was loaded, but more importantly, he disobeyed the cardinal rule of stage guns: treat every gun like it is a loaded weapon. An actor should never pull a trigger on a gun until the fight director commands him to.

November 15, 2008. Tucker Thayler, a 15 year old student at Desert Hills High School kills himself with a gun intended to be used as a sound effect for their production of *Oklahoma*. Apparently it was a real pistol with blanks. Apparently it was allowed as long as a parent was there to fire the gun. And I'm not sure how some schools still allow actual working firearms to be brought on campus. In most municipalities, you need a pyrotechnics license to fire blank ammunition for theatrical purposes; it is different than a standard gun license. After all, there are any number of firecracker and fireworks that average folk can use in their backyards legally in certain parts of the country, but once you want to fire them off inside a crowded theatre, the rules become much more stringent; the same is true of blank-firing guns.

Having a license means you have used blank ammunition before, the government trusts you to use blank ammunition in accordance with all safety standards and laws, and you are held liable for any accidents that may occur because of your negligence. If your area does not require licensing, you should still *act as though it does* and follow the same guidelines. Anyone handling or discharging blank ammunition should be familiar with it and know all the standard practices. Just because you can run out and buy it and "see what it does" does not mean that is in any way safe.

On March 31, 1993, Brandon Lee was filming a scene in *The Crow*. One of the thugs had a gun loaded with blanks to shoot at him. Because the blanks used were not correct and the gun was tampered with (stories are mixed), the gun had enough primer to push the cartridge out. Lee was hit in the abdomen and the bullet lodged in his spine. Several hours later, he died at the age of 28. A lot of the analysis of this tragedy points out that the thug should not have been aiming his gun directly at Lee. This goes back to the need for a qualified fight director; it's not enough to know how to acquire and setup blank ammunition. One also needs to know how to choreograph the scenes in a way to maximize safety.

On October 12, 1984, Jon-Eric Hexum was filming a scene in "Cover Up", his first big role. He had a prop .44 Magnum loaded with blanks, and apparently was unaware that it could still expel paper wadding. Bored during a delayed scene, he began playing with his gun. It was loaded with 2 blanks and 3 empty cartridges. He held it to his head, quipped, "Let's see if I've got one for me", and pulled the trigger. The paper wadding hit hard enough to dislodge a quarter-size piece of his skull and push it into his brain. Six days later he was pronounced dead from the massive bleeding in his brain. This event is just screaming with its lack of safety protocols. Why was an actor left with a loaded pistol for such a long time when it was not needed? Why was he unaware that it was loaded, or that blank ammunition at point-blank range can be just as lethal? And whether it was loaded or not, he should not have pointed it at his head; he broke the cardinal rule where one treats every gun like it is a loaded weapon.

I, for one, find it absurd that one would want to put so many people in potential danger (by using blank-firing ammunition) for, essentially, a *sound effect*. I mean, do we drop stage weights from the grid to the stage where actors are because we like the sound it makes? Why is that ridiculous, but igniting gun powder is acceptable? Regardless of your beliefs, you will probably face the situation of dealing with blank-firing guns at some point in your career as a prop master. When one is faced with the situation of having to use them, all the appropriate safety precautions should be followed to the letter.

*You might also like...*

### [Prop guns](#)

There's an interesting post over at Controlbooth.com about the correct handling of prop guns. What makes this a.....

# APPENDIX E – SAFETY MANUAL

## Firearms for Stage Policies and Procedures

### Stage Management

- Notify Security and Building Operations of the approximate time and amount of gunfire in upcoming rehearsals and performances.
- Notify House Management that there is gunfire in the production.
- Notify occupants of neighboring spaces when gunfire will occur in tests, rehearsal and performance.
- Arrange for posting and/or announcement of an audience warning that there will be gunfire in the production.
- Arrange to schedule **dedicated rehearsal time** for firearms training.
- If possible, prepare for “live fire” rehearsal time before tech.

### Crew/Props

- Test to determine assured safe distance for powder and wadding exhaust.
- Acoustic test *in the space*, to determine acceptable volume level.
- Inspection by a licensed gunsmith of any actual, previously uninspected firearm introduced into the production at any point. This should include any real firearm mechanically altered to accept and fire blank ammunition.
- Educate actors, staff and crew as to the benefits of hearing protection and demonstrate methods by which the effects of gunfire on the ears can be minimized.
- Teach actors what to do in the event of a jam or misfire.
- Treat all weapons as if they are loaded.
- No weapon should ever be set on a prop table or in a dressing room.
- All unattended weapons and ammunition should be stored in a locked container in a secure area.
- Store weapons and ammunition in separate locked containers.
- Unload all weapons before storage.
- Appoint a designated Firearms Master responsible for issuing, collecting, loading, cleaning, maintaining, storing and inventorying all weapons and ammunition in a production.
- A live weapon should be issued by the Firearms Master to the actor carrying it onstage at the last convenient time before their entrance and collected as soon as the weapon is carried offstage. It should be returned to lockup and unloaded at the first available opportunity.
- Weapons should be cleaned and inspected following every performance.

- Use dummy duplicate weaponry in any scene in which a live weapon is not necessary.
- When a real weapon is necessary but is not fired, it should be unloaded or loaded with dummy rounds.
- Real firearms should only be altered or adapted by a qualified gunsmith or armourer.

#### Actors

- No horseplay.
- Treat all weapons as if they are loaded.
- No handling or discharging of a firearm except in a training situation or when actually involved in a rehearsal or performance.
- Anyone involved in the production has the right (and obligation) to halt any action they believe to be unsafe in the course of rehearsal, tech or performance.
- The actor has the right to witness the loading of the weapon.

## **Prefatory Comment**

Theatrical productions frequently employ the use of weapons and fighting onstage. This activity is inherently dangerous and potentially injurious and/or deadly to both the acting and technical company as well as the audience members.

Many of the terms of use for weapons in our facility are set by state law, and by local law enforcement entities. Weapons of any sort may never be used without specific written permission. In many cases, the department may require special procedures to be used, including the use of specially trained professionals.

Failure to follow the policies established in this document may result in serious consequences, including arrest by law enforcement, immediate closing of a performance, termination of student status at UCR, or worst of all, serious bodily harm. Knowingly ignoring these rules might also result in personal liability litigation.

## **1. Weapons Defined**

- 1.1 The term “weapon” is defined as firearms, swords, knives, clubs, batons, arrows, spears or anything other object that may be used to fight with.
- 1.2 Weapons may be real, prop, blank firing, non-firing, or toy; and made of any material including plastic, metal, wood or resin.
- 1.3 All weapons which are proposed for use will be inspected by the Technical Coordinator and Fight Choreographer prior to use.

## **2. Terms of Use**

- 2.1 Weapons may be used in any production sponsored by the Department of Theatre if permission is granted. Production is defined as departmentally produced shows, class projects, scenes, class work, or any presentation of any sort which is presented in any space, if the presentation is sponsored by the Department of Theatre. (The word “stage” is sometimes interchangeable with “production” in this document.)
- 2.2 The use of weapons on stage requires special notification of appropriate University personnel including the University Police. Use of weapons is subject to the approval of the Campus Law Enforcement.
- 2.3 Directors must notify the department Production Manager upon proposal and selection of the play, if there is a special need for weapons in the production.

09/16/10 – UCR Production Manual – Guidelines for Weapons  
Department of Theatre, University of California, Riverside

- 2.4 The Production Manager will be notified at least 10 business days prior to the first use of any weapon in either rehearsal or performance.
- 2.5 A WEAPONS USE FORM detailing the type of weapon, proposed use of the weapon including all rehearsal and performance dates and times, actor names and phone numbers, venue, stage management and director, must be completed and distributed to the appropriate offices. Campus Law Enforcement may require either a picture of the weapon or a physical examination of the weapon prior to its use. The department Technical Coordinator will make the weapon available to law enforcement for this type of inspection.
- 2.6 The manner of transportation and the location of all weapons will be specified by the departmental Technical Coordinator.
- 2.7 The carrying, handling, or brandishing in public of any object that resembles a real weapon, or is a real weapon, is in violation of the law.
- 2.8 The brandishing of these weapons in public may be perceived as a threat to law enforcement officers. This perceived threat can lead to serious bodily injury or use of deadly force by law enforcement.
- 2.9 The Department of Theatre reserves the right to suspend the use of any weapon that is being used in an unsafe manner.
- 2.10 The Department of Theatre reserves the right to suspend any performance of a production in which a weapon(s) is being used in an unsafe manner.
- 2.11 The Department of Theatre reserves the right to close any production that uses weapons without prior written consent.

### **3. Weapon use during Rehearsal**

- 3.1 No weapon may be used in any rehearsal until designated personnel has trained the actor(s) in its appropriate use. Until the fight choreographer or other designated personnel has worked in the rehearsal, a facsimile prop will be used in place of the actual weapon, eg. wooden sticks for swords, etc.
- 3.2 All weapons will remain locked up until rehearsal call time. Management will be responsible for locking up all weapons when not in use for rehearsal.
- 3.3 A fight captain will be designated to oversee all rehearsals or warm-ups when the fight choreographer or other designated personnel is not present.

- 3.4 The fight captain will be responsible for inspection of all weapons prior to daily use. Any damage shall be reported to stage management for appropriate repair. Damage may include nicks, burrs, broken part, missing part, sharp edge.
- 3.5 The fight choreographer or other designated personnel must be present at any rehearsal where a weapon is used until the actors and fight captain has received sufficient training to work safely without the fight choreographer or other designated personnel.
- 3.6 No actor shall modify any weapon. All modifications shall go through stage management with the fight choreographer and technical coordinator consulted.
- 3.7 No actor or crew member shall touch or handle any weapon unless assigned to do so.

#### **4. Weapons use during Performance**

- 4.1 All weapons will remain secured until released by stage management.
- 4.2 All weapons will be inspected for damage by stage management, fight captain, props crew and actors.
- 4.3 There will be a fight call onstage prior to opening the house. This call will be run by the fight captain and stage management.
- 4.4 No actor or crew member shall touch or handle any weapon unless assigned to do so

#### **5. Use of weapons by actors: Cutting weapons**

- 5.1 Cutting weapons are defined as swords, knives, axes, spears, arrows, hatchets or any other edged object used as a weapon.
- 5.2 Do not use a sword as a cane or waking stick.
- 5.3 Do not duel with anyone unless the fight choreographer has staged it.
- 5.4 Do not hit any edged weapon against another unless the fight choreographer has staged it and has given instruction concerning which weapon to use.
- 5.6 All actors are responsible for checking his or her own weapon before use for sharp edges, nicks and dings and broken pieces.
- 5.7 Any damages must be reported immediately to stage management for proper repair.

5.8 Never point any edged weapon at any person unless specifically choreographed to do so.

### **6. Use of weapons by actors, Firearms**

- 6.1 A firearm is a weapon such as a rifle, pistol, revolver or gun, from which a shot could be discharged. Firearms may be functional or not.
- 6.2 Never attempt to load the chambers of a firearm used as a stage prop with real cartridges or anything other than the supplied blanks.
- 6.3 The loading of a blank into a firearm may only take place only when stage management, the actor who uses weapon and a third witness are present. This process will be signed off by the three parties each time loading occurs.
- 6.4 Do not modify or disassemble any firearm in any way. Any modification or disassembly may render the gun unsafe for its proper use.
- 6.5 Pulling the trigger on an empty firearm is called a "dry fire." Do not pull the trigger on any firearm without a blank (either new or used) loaded in the chamber as this ruins the firing pin.
- 6.6 When firing any firearm, gunpowder and gas will vent. This venting is hot and will contain small particles of gunpowder debris. The weapon must be fired at arm's length from the actor and any other person so that the venting dissipates harmlessly into the air.
- 6.7 Firing a weapon in close proximity to the hands, face, or other body parts may cause burns, cuts, abrasions and/or hearing loss.
- 6.8 Never point any firearm at any person unless specifically choreographed to do so.

From: Douglas Hildeman <Douglas.P.Hildeman.1@nd.edu>  
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2011 2:17 PM  
To: Alan Fackler  
Subject: RE: Gun Safety Policy/Procedure

Were in the process of revising this so it would be interesting to see what you come up with.

#### FIREARMS AND WEAPON PROPS

- a. DPAC management shall be notified of the use of weapons prior to load-in. This advance notice must allow sufficient time to obtain all of the required permits and approvals for firearms. Failure to provide timely notice will result in the denial of firearm use.
- b. All weapons used as properties, shall be incapable of firing a projectile.
- c. Use of facsimile firearms is always recommended.
- d. When the sound of a firearm is necessary to the action of the performance, starter pistols may be used.
- e. All firearms must be registered with the NDSP.
- f. All firearms must be tested for safety before they are used for any reason.
- g. Ammunition will be allocated by the Stage Manager for each firing.
- h. Firearms and other weapons are never to be left unattended anywhere in the DPAC.
- i. All weapons will be assigned to the care of Stage Management, and it will be their responsibility to insure their security.
- j. Actors will receive weapons just prior to using the weapon and return it to the person in charge immediately after.
- k. No weapons will ever be left unattended; even on a prop table, without express permission of DPAC management.
- l. Any firearm deemed unsafe in the opinion of the Notre Dame Security Police, Fire Chief, or DPAC management shall not be permitted.
- m. When artificial firearms will be discharged during a performance, the public shall be notified and warned via:
  - a. Signs posted near public entrances
  - b. Within the printed program (when feasible)

From: prod\_managers-1-bounces@mailman.ucsd.edu [mailto:prod\_managers-1-bounces@mailman.ucsd.edu] On Behalf Of Alan Fackler  
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2011 1:49 PM  
To: prod\_managers-1@ucsd.edu  
Subject: PMF- Gun Safety Policy/Procedure

Hi all,

We are in the process of updating our gun safety policy and I was wondering if anyone would be willing to share their policy/procedure.

Please reply only to me and I will compile and forward to anyone else interested.

Thanks in advance,  
Alan

Alan M. Fackler  
Production Manager

FultonTheatre

# **Yale School of Drama/Yale Repertory Theater** **Stage Weapons Use-Policies and Procedures**

**UPDATED 2/7/2011--Replaces All Previous Versions**

## **DEFINITIONS**

Weapons, as used in this policy encompass the following: Firearms (hand guns and rifles, including blank-firing, non-firing, facsimile, rubber, toy), edged weapons (such as knives, swords, spears, and daggers), bow and arrows, cross bows. Also could include clubs, axes, pitch forks, and other stage props that might be used is stage combat.

Powder, or Gun-powder—Any of the several types of explosive powder used to propel bullets or projectiles from firearms.

Live Shell or Round--Ammunition for use in a firearm that contains powder, a primer and a lead or metal bullet or projectile.

Blank Shell or Round—As above, but where the bullet or projectile has been replaced with paper wadding, or the open end is crimped, to contain the powder.

Spent Shell—Either a live or blank shell that has had the primer activated, the powder consumed and the bullet or wadding expelled. Usually, the projectile end of a Spent Shell will appear empty, and the primer end will be dimpled, either at the center or on the edge of the rim.

Dummy Shell—Prop or substitute shell that is made to look like a Live Shell with a bullet or projectile. There is no actual primer. In place of the powder, metal shot is often loosely placed in the cartridge to rattle in order to distinguish a Dummy Shell from a Live Shell.

Live-Firing Firearm—A firearm capable of receiving and firing a Live Shell.

Blank-Firing Firearm—A firearm that has been manufactured or altered to only receive and/or fire a Blank Shell.

Stage, Prop, Reproduction or Facsimile Firearm—A non-firing “firearm” than can neither receive nor fire any type of Live Shell.

Caliber—Refers to the measurement across the bullet or shell in hundredths (100ths) of an inch.

Weapons Supervisor—The staff person at YSD/YRT who is responsible for the oversight of the stage weapons in storage, and for their inspection, maintenance and cleaning outside of production use.

**Weapons Requestor**—The person who initiates the stage weapons request process and fills out and submits the Stage Weapons Request form to the Weapons Supervisor.

**Weapons Handler**—The person designated to receive the stage weapons and who manages their use, care and maintenance during rehearsals and performances. The weapons handler is also be responsible for training, or for arranging training, for the actors who will use or interact with the stage weapons in the production.

## **RULES**

YSD/YRT weapons will not be used, loaned or rented to any non-YSD/YRT group or production.

All weapons used in YSD/YRT programs and productions must be owned by YSD/YRT, or rented and obtained by YSD/YRT staff; no personal weapons may be used or brought on-site.

Any firearm used at YSD/YRT will be non-firing or blank-firing only. Firearms capable of firing live rounds are not allowed. (NOTE-Shotguns are currently the only exception to this.)

## **STORAGE**

Weapons are normally stored in a secure area at 149 York St.

Weapons used in rehearsal will be stored in their transport case or other appropriate case, which will be secured in a locked cabinet and/or in a locked room when not in use.

Secure spaces for our various rehearsal rooms or buildings are:

- 305 Crown—Closets in the rear hallway on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor; and./or room 011 in the basement
- 149 York—rehearsal storage cabinets in rooms 107, 109 and 221
- 217 Park—to be determined as necessary; possibly room 101A if rekeyed, or props storage cabinets
- 1156 Chapel—to be determined when used for rehearsal; typically in the venue's gun cabinet

Weapons used in technical rehearsals and performances will be stored in their transport cases, and in a secure properties lock-up or a gun cabinet. Gun cabinets are located in the Rep, UT, Iseman and Cabaret theaters. Keys to these gun cabinets will be signed out along with the weapons and their transport cases for productions to be performed in these venues.

## **REQUESTS**

Use of a weapon during a rehearsal or performance must be approved in advance. A Weapons Use Request Form for the use of weapons in any YSD/YRT production or project must be submitted to the following people as noted below for their review, approval and signature.

Rep Productions-James Mountcastle

YSD's, SRP's, SP's, NPL's, SPR, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Acting Projects-Mary Hunter

Drama 50's-Jon Reed

Yale Cabaret Productions—James Mountcastle

Class Use-Bill Reynolds

### **ADMINISTRATION**

The YSD/YRT **Weapons Supervisor** will be the Props Assistant, Jen McClure, who will oversee the maintenance, care, cleaning and repair of all YSD/YRT weapons outside of production use. (Weapons in production use that need repair beyond routine maintenance should be brought to the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor for such repair.) The Weapons Requester will schedule appointments to sign-out weapons. Brian Cookson will coordinate this process, approve any sign-out, and review the YSD/YRT use, care, maintenance and documentation procedures with the person who is signing for the weapon.

The selection, approval and sign-out process for weapons should proceed as follows:

- The director, designer and stage manager meet to discuss the production's requirements for stage weapons, and to develop a preliminary list of weapons and their anticipated use.
- The director, designer and stage manager review the YSD/YRT Weapons Inventory that is on-line on the G-Drive at:
  - \\Ysd1\ysd\_pub\Productions\Props\Weapons Inventory
- From the Weapons Inventory, a preliminary list of weapons is developed. This list is sent to Brian Cookson and Jen McClure via an email for review.
- A meeting is scheduled with the designer, the stage manager, Brian Cookson and/or Jen McClure to review the proposed weapons, their anticipated use in the production and the schedule for their use.
- Once the list of available and appropriate weapons is defined for the production, the Weapons Use Request Form is filled out, and sent for approval as noted above.
- The Weapons Requestor then meets with Brian Cookson and/or Jen McClure to sign-out and obtain the weapons, their transport cases and to receive appropriate training. The approved Weapons Request form is left with the Weapons Supervisor.

The Weapons Requester will be responsible for returning the weapon to the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor, and for following all weapons procedures included in this policy.

The **Weapons Handler** is responsible for the use, care and maintenance of weapon(s) once the weapons' responsibility is transferred from the Weapons Requester. For productions that have a Fight Director and/or a Fight Captain assigned, that person or

persons will advise the Weapons Handler on the use, care and maintenance of the weapon(s).

Duties of the Weapons Requester and the Weapons Handler are noted below for various types of YSD/YRT productions:

- A. Rep Productions--The Stage Manager (Weapons Requester) obtains the weapon, and receives the appropriate training on its use, care and maintenance prior to its initial use. Once the production moves into the performance space, the Stage Manager will relinquish this responsibility to the Props Runner (Kate Begley Baker), who then is fully responsible as the Weapons Handler for the use, care and maintenance of the weapon, and who will return the weapon to the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor after the run of the show.
- B. YSD Series Productions: (YSD1, YSD2, YSD3, YSD4(R, B, &G))--- The Stage Manager (Weapons Requester) obtains the weapon, and receives the appropriate training on its use, care and maintenance prior to its initial use. Once the production moves into the performance space, the Stage Manager will transfer this responsibility to the show's Assistant Stage Manager (Weapons Handler), who then is fully responsible for the use, care and maintenance of the weapon. The Assistant Stage Manager will return the weapon to the Stage Manager at strike, who will return the weapon to the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor.
- C. SRP's, SP's, NPL's, SPR, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Acting Projects— The Stage Manager (Weapons Requester) obtains the weapon, and receives the appropriate training on its use, care and maintenance prior to its initial use. Once the production moves into the performance space, the Stage Manager will designate and transfer this responsibility to a backstage crew person(Weapons Handler) The Weapons Handler is then responsible for the use, care and maintenance of the weapon, and for returning the weapon to the Stage Manager, who will return the weapons to the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor.
- D. Drama 50's-- The Weapons Requester and the Weapons Handler is typically the same person, who will be determined by the Senior Associate Production Supervisor. This person is responsible for obtaining the weapon, and for its use, care and maintenance, and for returning the weapon to the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor.
- E. Cabaret--The Cabaret Production Manager designates a Weapons Requester and/or a Weapons Handler who obtains the weapon and receives the appropriate training in its use, care and maintenance prior to its initial use. [NOTE-This procedure needs to be confirmed by the Cabaret staff.]
- F. Class Use—The Weapons Requester and the Weapons Handler will be determined by Bill Reynolds. This person is responsible for obtaining the weapon, and for its use, care and maintenance, and for returning the weapon to the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **External: Building-to-Building**

Yale Police can provide a secure escort for all building-to-building transport of weapons. Call Lt. Joe Vitale, 203-432-4415, at least 24 hours in advance to schedule this escort. Weapons must be transported in a locked or secure case, and secured at each YSD/YRT location as noted above.

### **Internal: Within a YSD/YRT Building**

Unless on-stage, or obviously part of the performance, all stage weapons must be kept out of the view of audience, or other non-production staff, cast or crew. To achieve this, weapons that are to be transported within a building must be moved or carried in a case, or other container specifically designed and designated for the purpose of such transport. The plan for any internal transport if expected must be included in the transport notification noted below.

## **NOTIFICATION OF TRANSPORT AND FIRING OF WEAPONS**

At least 24-hours in advance of each weapons transport, the Weapons Requester, as noted above, will notify via email Yale Police Lt. Joe Vitale ([joseph.vitale@yale.edu](mailto:joseph.vitale@yale.edu)), Yale Police Sgt. Nelson Nettleton ([nelson.nettleton@yale.edu](mailto:nelson.nettleton@yale.edu)), Bill Reynolds ([bill.reynolds@yale.edu](mailto:bill.reynolds@yale.edu)), Mary Hunter ([mary.hunter@yale.edu](mailto:mary.hunter@yale.edu)), James Mountcastle ([james.mountcastle@yale.edu](mailto:james.mountcastle@yale.edu)) and the Associate Production Supervisor, with information about the planned weapons transportation, including who will be doing the transport, how, from where and to where, and the date and approximate time of the transport.

Yale Police must be notified of all intended firing of weapons. At least 24-hours in advance of each weapons use, the Weapons Requester as noted above will notify via email Yale Police Lt. Joe Vitale ([joseph.vitale@yale.edu](mailto:joseph.vitale@yale.edu)), Yale Police Sgt. Nelson Nettleton ([nelson.nettleton@yale.edu](mailto:nelson.nettleton@yale.edu)), Bill Reynolds ([bill.reynolds@yale.edu](mailto:bill.reynolds@yale.edu)), Mary Hunter ([mary.hunter@yale.edu](mailto:mary.hunter@yale.edu)), James Mountcastle ([james.mountcastle@yale.edu](mailto:james.mountcastle@yale.edu)) and the Associate Production Supervisor. Be sure to include the following information in this notification: times and dates of use, types of weapons to be used, names of Stage Manager and others who will be responsible for the use, care and maintenance of the weapons.

Depending on the location of their intended use, other building occupants must be notified of the planned use and firing of weapons. For instance, in the case of weapons use in the Iseman Theater, the notification emails above will be forwarded to the staff of the School of Art by Bill Reynolds.

## **TRAINING**

All TDP and Stage Management students will receive weapons' training that includes a review of YSD/YRT weapons policies, the use, care and maintenance of weapons, and the firing of weapons in a controlled setting. The Rep Stage Carpenter and the Rep Props Runner should also receive this training. The Props Master and the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor should receive this training, and more extensive training in the inspection and

repair of weapons. The Props Master and the Weapons Supervisor will review policies and procedures with the Weapons Requester when weapons are signed out.

The Weapons Requester who is signing out the firearm will be trained by the Props Master or the YSD/YRT Weapons Supervisor in the weapon's safe use, loading, firing, cleaning and care. (The firearm will be test fired as part of this training, so notification described above is required.) A cleaning kit and a locked storage/transport case will be issued in addition to the weapon(s). Any additional security procedures will be discussed.

The training will also include a discussion of sound levels related to firearm types and load sizes so that appropriate firearms and blank loads are issued. Eye and hearing protection should be used during any test firing. (Eye and ear protection equipment is available for purchase from the YSD/YRT Inventory as necessary.)

## **Procedures and Best Practices for the Handling of Weapons**

### **During Rehearsals and Fight Calls-not in the performance space**

TBD—This section needs to be developed and written.

**During Rehearsals, Fight Calls and Performances in the performance space—The following is based on Rep Production staff. The procedures should be adapted as necessary depending upon each production's staffing requirements.**

### **GENERAL**

#### **Safe Storage**

All weapons are to be locked up when not in use for supervised rehearsals, fight calls, and performances. This includes but is not limited to guns (including blank-firing, non-firing, rubber and toy), edged weapons, knives, swords, daggers, bow and arrows, cross bows, etc. Only the Props Runner (Weapons Handler) has access to these weapons while in safe storage.

### **FIREARMS**

#### **Blank Firing Weapons-Firearms**

Blank Rounds or Shells are stored in a separate container from the firearms(s). A firearm is stored in a case which is then locked in a gun cabinet backstage.

Only the Props Runner and the actor who fires the firearm may handle it while in Production. The actor may only handle the weapon during supervised rehearsals, fight call, and performances.

Only the Props Runner may load a blank firing weapon while in Production. Only the necessary blanks to be used up during a supervised rehearsal fight call, and/or performance will be loaded into the weapon.

A blank firing weapon is only loaded prior to use. Once the weapon is loaded, it should remain with and on the Props Runner until it is handed off to the actor who fires it. The Props Runner will wear a holster or other appropriate device for this purpose as practicable. A loaded blank firing weapon should never be locked up.

The actor will hand-off the stage weapon directly to the Props Runner as soon as the actor leaves the performance area. When such a hand-off from or to the Props Runner is not feasible, an alternate crew person may be designated to hand off or receive the weapon from the actor and then transfer the weapon to the Props Runner.

When handing an unloaded firearm to an actor, the Props Runner will do the following procedure. First, make eye contact with the actor, say that the “weapon is unloaded”, and hand the firearm grip first with the muzzle pointing down to the actor. Once the actor responds with a “Thank you”, release the firearm, and have the actor check that the weapon is indeed unloaded.

When handing off a loaded firearm to an actor, first make eye contact, say that the “weapon is loaded”. Hand the weapon grip first with the muzzle pointing down to the actor. Once the actor responds with a “Thank you”, release the weapon.

Check the weapon before every fight call and after every fight call. After every performance check and clean the weapon.

Keep a Gun Log for blank firing weapons noting when the gun was loaded, how many rounds were loaded, how many rounds were fired, when the gun was cleaned, and when it is checked in. Also notate on the gun log if there were any problems or special situations with the gun that performance, i.e. a misfire. This helps the Props Department track the performance and maintenance of a weapon.

Keep the spent shells in separate envelopes or zip-top baggies marked with the date in case a problem should arise and we need to check the ammo. Once the show closes the ammo is disposed of, or recycled.

#### Back-up Plan

The production team should develop and document a back-up plan in case a problem should arise with a weapon, whether it be a sword breaking or a firing weapon having a mechanical failure. The backup plan is usually coordinated among the Fight Choreographer, Stage Management, and the Props Department. In the case of blank firing firearms, the back-up plan should include consideration for a sound cue.

#### Understudy Rehearsals

The Props Runner will acquire a rubber or resin gun for use for understudy rehearsal. The stand-in gun will be locked in a case and the case will then either be locked in James Mountcastle’s office at the Rep or Brian Cookson’s office at the UT for use during understudy rehearsals. Arrangements can be made on a per show basis to fit the needs of the production and rehearsal.

# SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE SAFETY HANDBOOK

January 2006

## SECTION II: PRODUCTION SAFETY INFORMATION

### J. Strange and Unusual Stage Objects and Effects:

#### Weapons Safety:

##### General Principals:

All weapons are dangerous and should always be regarded as such. Whenever possible, a professional Fight Master should be consulted for all fights to be staged, especially those using weapons of any kind.

Weapons for the stage can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Firearms – guns, handguns, rifles, machine guns, cannons, etc.
- Swords, daggers, spears, knives, and other sharp-edged or blunt objects
- Bows and Arrows (Did you know a bow is more dangerous when an arrow is not fired?)
- Whips – including bullwhips, “Indiana Jones” whips, cat o’ nine tails, and horse crop
- Sticks and clubs
- Shields (while not actually a weapon, a vital part of stage combat)

Whoever is responsible for procuring weapons should research the common safety practices employed in use of each weapon. Any special information should be passed on to the Fight Master and Stage Manager, and incorporated into the action.

One person should be in charge of all weapons, to secure them between scenes and to take care of them for the course of the show. This person should be trained in all aspects of weapon maintenance, and be particularly alert for signs of damage to the weapon.

All performers and stagehands should be made aware of the common theatrical prop rule – If it is not your prop, DO NOT touch it! This is especially true in dealing with weapons. Do not permit actors or other persons to play with the weapons, or even to hold them. This is particularly important in the case of blank firing firearms.

Whenever working outdoors, notify the relevant local authorities of your intentions and activities. Consult the appropriate law enforcement or governing bodies to insure the legality of your activities and compliance with permit requirements.

##### Guidelines for Safe Use of Weapons:

- **Do NOT engage in horseplay with any weapons.**
- **No person is to be coaxed, coerced or otherwise forced into handling a weapon.**
- **If it is not your prop, LEAVE IT ALONE!** Only those who are designated to work with the weapons should be handling them.
- **Avoid dropping any weapon.** If the stage action requires that a weapon be dropped or thrown, then several backups should be provided.
- **Assign a responsible person to care for weapons.** One person should be responsible for care, maintenance, and distribution of weapons. The weapons should be secured after use and kept in a locked storage area.
- **Hire a Fight Choreographer.** A professional Fight Master can make any fight safer for the participants. He/She will train the actors in how to hold the weapon, how to fight, how to avoid getting hurt, and how to recover from a mistake in the action - an invaluable component to a successful stage fight.

- **Rehearse the fight each day.** From rehearsal to closing, the fights will need to be rehearsed each day before the show.
- **Purchase weapons from a reliable and reputable source.** Many attractive weapons are not stage-worthy, and will shatter under the stress of stage combat. Avoid products from companies that will not guarantee that their weapons are stage-worthy. Quality weapons are more expensive and more difficult to locate than reproduction “wall-hanger” weapons. If purchasing is out of the budget, then rent. Do not use cheap weapons.

## **Firearms Safety:**

### **Overview:**

All firearms, whether non-functional reproductions or blank-firing adaptations of real guns, must be treated as though they were actual live-firing weapons, and the rules for safe firearm handling, and plain common sense, should always be observed.

### **Guidelines for Safe Use of Firearms:**

- Blanks can kill.
- Treat all firearms as though they are loaded. This includes real and prop guns.
- Never point a firearm at anyone, including yourself. Consider that whatever you point the gun at will be destroyed.
- Do not look down the muzzle of a firearm to see if it is loaded. Rather, check by opening the breech of the weapon while it is pointed down or in a safe direction.
- Never lay down a firearm or leave it unattended. All firearms should be secured when not in use. All firearms should be handed over to the responsible person immediately after use.
- Do NOT engage in horseplay with any firearms or weapons.
- No person is to be coaxed, coerced or otherwise forced into handling a firearm.
- Avoid dry-firing any firearm. This means do not pull the trigger and let the action fall.
- Avoid dropping any firearm. If the stage action requires that weapon be dropped, then that weapon should be unarmed. And several backups should be provided.
- If it is not your prop, LEAVE IT ALONE! Only those who are designated to work with the weapons should be handling them.

### **When using blank firing firearms, the additional guidelines also apply:**

- Never place your finger on the trigger until you are ready to shoot. Until then, keep your finger to the side of the trigger.
- Always maintain a distance of at least 20 feet between the muzzle of the firearm and any object or person being fired upon. If, for staging reasons, you must fire at an actor, cheat the action by aiming slightly off to one side so that no one is in the line of fire.
- Protect your eyes and ears. Guns are noisy and can cause hearing loss. Hearing protection in the form of ear plugs or ear cuffs should be used whenever blanks are discharged, particularly in a confined space. Whenever possible use eye protection, particularly with weapons that eject casings.
- Do not interchange blanks. Do not assume that a blank is not a “real” bullet. All loading of blanks is to be done by a qualified technician.
- Never have live ammunition on the set. Some weapons, though they have been made or altered for stage use, can chamber live ammunition.
- Never load a firearm until you are actually ready to use it.
- Always secure firearms when not in use. A locking case or cabinet should be made available. Also, when ammunition is used – blank or otherwise – it must be stored separately.

### Sources:

Centre Firearms – Guide to Theatrical Weaponry;

Beginner’s Guide to Guns and Shooting by Clair F. Rees;

IATSE Safety Bulletin No. 1, Recommendations for Safety with Firearms;

Firearms Safety by Michael McCann, adapted from Lights! Camera! Safety! By Michael McCann.

**UCB DEPT. OF THEATER, DANCE & PERFORMANCE STUDIES**  
**WEAPONS HANDLING GUIDELINES**

1. WEAPONS - GUNS, KNIVES, SWORDS, WHIPS, etc. - ARE NOT TOYS. All weapons must be used only as intended by the choreography of the play. Never play with them onstage or offstage, or remove them from the stage/backstage area.
2. Point-blank firing and dry firing (i.e. pulling the trigger for fun when the gun is unloaded) of weapons is not permitted.
3. Adequate time will be allotted during tech rehearsals to allow for comfort with use of weapons. Please speak to a TDPS staff member if you have any concerns.
4. Proper aiming and safe firing distances will be determined by the TDPS staff for each firing of a weapon based on weapon type, caliber, and load size. "Safe Distance" will refer to people, and surroundings (soft goods, scenery, drops, scrims, props, costumes, etc.). All proper aiming and safe distance guidelines must be adhered to for each firing of each weapon.
5. Certain blank loads may require the use of earplugs by those nearby during firing, including performers onstage.
6. When firing a weapon backstage, the technician will wear the protective gear deemed necessary: goggles, hearing protection, etc. Any other personnel in the vicinity will also be provided with safety equipment. The weapon must be pointed in a safe direction when fired.
7. The stage management representative, theater supervisor, or other designated employee, and all actors and crew handling the weapon(s) will be taught how to use those weapons in a safe manner, i.e.; loading, firing, cleaning, safe distances, etc.
8. It will remain the primary responsibility of the stage management, TDPS staff, and designated prop crew-member to maintain, load, handoff and receive, and store the weapon(s).
9. Only individuals indicated above, who have been instructed to handle the weapon, may do so. This means only the actor whose prop it is, the dedicated crew-member assigned to maintain, load, handoff and receive, and store the weapon, the stage management representative, and the TDPS staff.
10. If not plugged, the barrel of the weapon must be checked for obstructions before firing, to avoid launching a projectile.
11. Use only the blanks designated for each individual use of each weapon – absolutely no substitutions.
12. Firing weapons MUST be inspected, cleaned, and oiled as directed after each use to ensure proper function.
13. While backstage (and not standing by for use onstage), weapons will be stored unloaded and in a safe, protected manner. Following post-show cleaning, all weapons will be immediately stored in a dedicated locked storage. A checklist must be referred to each show to ensure all requirements have been met.
14. As with any injury incurred in a TDPS facility, any injury resulting from the discharge of a weapon MUST be checked by a physician and reviewed by management. Paperwork must be filed out in detail.
15. TDPS will notify UCPD and other building tenants of the intended schedule for the use of the weapon(s) to avoid any confusion or problems.

**I have read and understood the guidelines for weapons handling at this facility.  
I agree to abide by these rules.**

**Name [print]:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Show:** \_\_\_\_\_