

Safety Guidelines for Prop Weaponry

Emerson College encourages its students' creative endeavors; as such, it is imperative to make sure its students are performing in an environment as free from risk as possible while creating performance-based work. The purpose of this document is to provide an aid for understanding the protocols regarding the use of look-alike weapons as they pertain to use in a theatrical production at Emerson College. It should be noted that no document is able to speak explicitly to every circumstance, since fight choreography is developed for a particular production and is unique to its specific needs. This document seeks to outline common issues amidst a vast majority of theatrical combat and/or "threat"-based scenarios while using prop weaponry, as well as provide you with resources to obtain, use and care for prop weaponry. Remember the common-sense adage: "when in doubt, ask."

In order to obtain approval from the Emerson College Police Department, a representative from your organization (production manager, director, stage manager, or prop master) must read, agree to, and abide by the following document, and sign on page 8.

Real Weapons

Real weapons are weapons manufactured with the ability and potential intent of harming another person, which include but are not limited to actual guns (pistols, rifles, flintlocks, etc.), sharp knives, daggers, swords, and bows and arrows. Real weapons are not allowed in any Emerson College building nor are they permitted in any rehearsal space off-campus where Emerson students are participating.

Disabled guns, defined herein as guns initially manufactured to fire ANY type of projectile that have been modified to an inoperable state, are not allowed inside of any theater or rehearsal space or any off-campus rehearsal space where Emerson Students are participating.

Do not use a sharp blade for any sort of fight scene or struggle. Do not take it upon yourself to dull a sharpened blade. Dulling a sharp weapon can lessen its tensile strength and can cause the blade to shatter. Understand that a knife employed in a non-combative (food preparation, carving, etc.) scene is not covered by this document.

Live ammunition, blank firing cartridges and loads, paintball or airsoft pellets, or anything else designed to be capable of being fired is not allowed in any way in any Emerson rehearsal or building.

Prop Weapons

A Prop weapon or Stage weapon is a weapon manufactured to give the illusion of authenticity without the actual ability to harm anyone in the intended perceived fashion. PROP WEAPONS SHOULD ALWAYS BE TREATED AS REAL WEAPONS, AS THEY MAY STILL BE CAPABLE OF CAUSING VERY REAL INJURY.

Stage weapons include but are not limited to guns, knives, swords, spears, bows, arrows, crossbows and clubs. It is also important to recognize that everyday objects which may include but are not limited to, pencils, lamps, rolling pins, etc. may also become weapons when staging combat scenes, and the usual protocols regarding weapon safety must still be employed.

Cap guns are not permitted in Emerson College buildings as they are considered a pyro-technic.

Prop weapons can cause unsafe situations and harm if they are not used and cared for correctly. Please use the guidelines below to ensure the safety of all project participants.

ALL PROP WEAPONS MUST BE APPROVED BY THE EMERSON COLLEGE POLICE DEPARTMENT before they are permitted for use in any Emerson College related production. Please contact the Office of Student Life (Josh_Hamlin@emerson.edu) for information on the weapons approval process.

The actual weapon in its performance-ready state must be physically inspected by the ECPD - this means that if you are renting theatrical weaponry, you will need to rent the item(s) BEFORE you even know that it will be approved. It is therefore advisable to rent only from reliable theatrical prop weapon suppliers, to decrease the likelihood of being rejected. (Please see pages 5 and 6 for reliable suppliers)

Prop Weapons: Guidelines for proper care and use.

General

1. All prop weapons must always be treated as real weapons. All prop guns should be handled as if loaded (even if it is a wooden cut-out) and all prop knives should be treated as sharp. Be especially conscious of the point on bladed weapons, as they can still cause penetrative injury even though they're dull. Prop weapons can still cause severe harm or worse and should be treated with respect.

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2. A responsible member of your production team, preferably a Stage Manager or Props Master, should be delegated as the person in charge for ensuring proper safety practices with the prop.
3. Find a secure place to lock your prop when not in use inside and outside of rehearsals. Prop weapons are not allowed to be stored in residence halls. You may store them on campus with the Emerson College Police Department, the Emerson Stage Production Office, the Department of Performing Arts Weapons Prop Storage area, your locker on the fourth floor of the Paramount or your locker on the fifth floor of the Tufte.
4. When transporting your prop weapon make sure it is not exposed. If possible, keep it inside of a lock box inside of a bag during transport.
5. It is crucial that your prop is cared for and maintained. Always inspect weaponry before and after every rehearsal and performance. Perform regular cleaning and maintenance on the props as recommended by the supplier. Do not attempt to use a damaged prop.

Rehearsal and Performance

Do not attempt to work beyond your capabilities – pushing artistic boundaries is what school is about, as this should be a safe place to experiment, fail and grow. However, do not let that attitude infect the necessity for proper safety measures – make it, LITERALLY a "safe place to fail"! If you don't know how to make an illusion safe, seek out appropriate help, which could include hiring a professional fight director or stunt coordinator; working with personnel who have training and experience; and/or finding a creative solution to the story-telling needs ... perhaps something that isn't realistic would not only make the moment safer, but might have more of an emotional impact on the audience as well.

1. At the start of the rehearsal process, a safety meeting must take place where all members in the room are informed that there will be a prop weapon in use, which individuals will be handling it, and how it will be used. At the top of the rehearsal in which the scene(s) will be rehearsed where the prop is used, another safety meeting should occur where all members in the room are informed that there will be a prop weapon in use, which individuals will be handling it and how it will be used in the scene. If the plan changes, another safety meeting should be held to update the cast and crew.

2. If a prop weapon in your performance is used in a threatening or combative manner, a fight call should take place before every performance with all cast and crew involved in the scene.
3. A notice must be posted on rehearsal room entrances and exits that a prop weapon is being used. Be sure to take the posting down at the end of each rehearsal. If you are rehearsing in an unconventional rehearsal space and a prop weapon is in use, make efforts to ensure that persons outside of the space have zero visibility of your rehearsal.
4. When a prop weapon is not in use keep it securely and safely locked away at all times.
5. When the prop weapon is needed, the person designated as the responsible party should hand off the weapon to the actor. When the stage action with the prop is complete, it should be immediately returned to the responsible party and secured until it is needed again. The prop should not be preset on a prop table or left on a prop table after use. It must either be warn by a stage manager or promptly locked up.
6. While the prop weapon is in use, the user should never point the prop weapon at anyone or themselves. While staging never aim a weapon directly at the face, head, or body of a performer or directly at audience members.
7. Always aim off line, either up – or downstage of the victim.
8. Beware of disarms; when dropping a prop from a large height or from repetitive drops the prop can become damaged. Do not let the disarmed weapon become a trip-hazard later in the fight. Do not let a disarmed weapon slide towards the audience.
9. Never leave a prop weapon unattended, including on prop tables. Ron De Marco is happy to loan appropriate holsters and/or straps on request.
10. At no time should there ever be any horseplay with a prop weapon.

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Emergency Procedure

Despite careful preparation and steps to minimize risks as much as possible, accidents may still occur.

In the event of an emergency:

Call the Emerson College Police Department's emergency line:

When calling from a cell phone or off campus phone: 617-824-8888

When calling from a campus phone: 8888

Be prepared to give the following information:

Location of the emergency – directions, street address, building, and room.

Type and severity of the emergency:

Fire – type and size of fire.

Medical – type of illness or injury, cause, number of victims.

Police/crime – type of crime, description of suspects and their direction of travel.

Chemical/hazardous materials – quantity and type of substances involved, hazards and injuries.

When the incident occurred.

Your name, location you're calling from, and phone number.

Call from a safe location, if possible. Remain calm. Speak slowly and clearly. Do not hang up the phone until the dispatcher tells you to.

Resources

The most important thing to remember to create a safe atmosphere for yourself and others to work in is, “when in doubt, ask”. Please use the list of the following people and vendors as resources for your project.

Personnel Resources

Daniel Burmester:
Production Manager
Emerson Stage
Daniel_burmester@emerson.edu
617-824-3095

Ted Hewlett
Acting Faculty
Department of Performing Arts
Ted_Hewlett@emerson.edu
617-824-8386

Ron De Marco
Properties Master
Department of Performing Arts
Ronald_De_Marco@emerson.edu
617-543-1874 (cell phone)

Rental resources:

Preferred Arms (swords, knives, prop guns)
Robb Hunter
www.preferredarms.com

Rogue Steel (swords, daggers, shields)
Neil Massey
www.rogesteel.com

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No Quarter Arms (swords, daggers, scabbards)
Dennis Graves
www.noquarterarms.com

Centre Firearms (mostly deal with blank-firing weapons, but have non-firing models as well)
www.centrefirearms.com

Purchasing Resources

Knighthawk Armory: <http://www.latex-weaponry.com/>

Combat Training Aids: <http://www.combattrainingaids.com/>

Western Stage Props: <http://www.westernstageprops.com/>

Blueguns: <http://www.blueguns.com/>

Safety Common Sense

The first rule of safety: when in doubt, ask. Understand what makes a rehearsal or performance safe and do your best to act in a professional manner. If you ever have any questions about safety, contact Daniel Burmester, Ted Hewlett or Ron De Marco.

Safety begins long before your rehearsal or performance. It is the responsibility of each member of your team to educate themselves and one another about safety and to arrive to rehearsals and performances on time, well rested and healthy.

Accidents are caused by negligence, lack of awareness, and lack of foresight. It is important to stay alert, understand the potential dangers, and be able to recognize the safety hazards in advance.

Follow your instincts. If it feels unsafe, it probably is. And if you think something is unsafe or someone is acting in an unsafe manner, say something. By calling attention to the safety hazard, it gives your Stage Managers, Director, crewmembers and fellow actors a chance to reevaluate the situation.

Safety must be your first concern, making a great piece of theatre is second. Everyone wants the show to be great, but it is never worth risking the injury or death of anyone involved. Take care of one another.

I have read and understand this document and will comply with its guidelines.

Signature: _____

Date: _____