

Stunt Definitions

Safety in action guidance for the entertainment industry

What is a stunt?

While the entertainment industry has evolved significantly over the years, stunts have historically lacked consistent regulations and standards, often relying on individual production companies to make decisions on safety protocols.

This guidance document is one of a series produced by Havoc Stunts and Production Safety. It gives specific guidance and advice on best safe practice when defining scripted hazardous scenes and stunts. It is aimed at production organisations, freelance producers and directors who may be exposing cast and crew to risks and hazards during filming.

We advise referring to The HSE Entertainment Information Sheet No 17 where further reading can be found. We use extracts below for simplicity and cohesion.

Stunt work can include the following:

- Performing stunts that have the potential to cause harm to the performer/artist or others;
- Stunts that include the use of external hazards such as fire and explosives;
- The use of aircraft, motor vehicles for filming or as part of the activity;
- Sequences performed in confined spaces, underwater or in other areas where breathing may be impaired;
- Fights, with or without weapons.

What is a Stunt?

A stunt is where a competent person, such as a professional stunt artist, simulates an apparently dangerous activity in a careful and controlled manner.

How is a competency measured?

Qualifications in stunt performing and coordinating do not exist in the UK. Competency is judged as knowledgeable, experienced and trained.

Who is a competent stunt coordinator?

A stunt coordinator should ideally:

- Minimum ten years experience in the entertainment industry as a stunt performer
- Recognised award in Health & Safety including risk management and assessment
- Relevant Public Liability insurance
- Experience in coaching/teaching and assessing

FEATURED STUNT

As a sole or as a group of performers involved in the main scripted set piece action sequence during a scene and may be eligible for a paid adjustment.

BACKGROUND STUNT

As a sole or as a group of performers placed within an action scene for safety.

SPECIALIST STUNT

An individual who is brought into the production to perform a singular stunt during an action sequence that is within that persons particular skillset.

Competency Checks

Producers should make sure that only those people who have the necessary knowledge, experience and training should be involved in stunt work. Different levels of competence and supervision may be needed for simple or complex stunts.

Prior to engaging a stunt coordinator, it is the responsibility of the producers to check the coordinators suitability for the role. This should take into consideration the following:

- The requirements of the proposed scripted action line up with the coordinators relevant skill set and experience.
- Their knowledge and background of the action type and its specific requirements.
- The coordinator has had training in risk management and assessment, health and safety and ideally as an assessor or coach.
- It is advisable to ask for at least three previous stunt risk assessment produced by the coordinator.
- Seek references from previous producers and directors as to their suitability.

Roles and responsibilities

The legal duties of health and safety rest with the employer, in this case the production company. On set the responsibility for the crew rests with the 1st AD. The stunt coordinator is responsible for the on screen action that involves the artists, the performers and any supporting artists. If any crew may be affected by the action sequence, safety measures need to be discussed between the 1st AD

and the stunt coordinator and control measures put in place.

It is the responsibility of the stunt coordinator to engage competent stunt performers for the relevant action sequence. Sometimes the artist may be competent enough, with training, to undertake the sequence.

The stunt coordinator will create a relevant risk assessment detailing the activity, its hazards and risks, who is at risk, their control measures and how they will mitigate the level of risk. This will be approved by the production who then distribute it to all crew. Who is responsible for deciding what is a stunt?

Ultimately the responsibility rests with the Production Company (employer). Together with the Stunt Coordinator and the Director, a decision will be made to design the action sequence under the supervision of the Stunt Coordinator.

Further Information

ETIS17: Stunts, fights and other potentially hazardous production activities: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/etis17.pdf>

Health and safety in audio-visual production: Your legal duties: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg360.pdf>

HSE Film, Theatre and Broadcasting Resources: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/theatre-tv/resources.htm>

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WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (the HSW Act) requires employers and the self-employed to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and safety of themselves, all employees and anyone who may be affected by their work. This will include affected freelance staff and members of the public.

Reasonably practicable means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the real risk in terms of money, time or trouble. However, you do not need to take action if it would be grossly disproportionate to the level of risk.

Other legislation may apply depending on the details of the work being carried out. For instance, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build upon the requirements in the HSW Act and require duty holders to assess and control risks.

