



Code of Practice 06

Weapons in Stage Productions

2019

Published by:
The Association of British Theatre Technicians
4th Floor
55 Farringdon Road
LONDON EC1M 3JB
www.abtt.org.uk

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Section 1 - Requirements	4
Definitions	4
Flow chart and compliance.....	5
Producer's Note	6
Section 2 - Responsibilities.....	7
Competence.....	8
Armourers & Registered Firearms Dealers (RFD's)	8
Performers	8
Hazards	8
Blank ammunition	9
Precautionary measures	9
Faults and misfires.....	10
Condition of weapons.....	10
Notification to the police	11
Section 3 - Weapons Procedures & Controls.....	12
Storage.....	12
Firearms being used during rehearsal and performance	12
Section4 - Edged weapons on Stage	17
Banned Illegal Weapons.....	17
Outdoor Performances.....	17
Risk Assessments.....	18
Firearms Briefing	14
FAQ's	19
References:.....	20
Appendix 1. Preliminary Notification example.....	21
Appendix 2. Sample Producer's Note.....	22

Introduction

This document has been produced to provide a consistent approach to the control and management of Weapons used in theatrical productions. Guidance is provided to meet the legal obligations and duties necessary to own, operate and control weapons in theatre performance.

Firearms and bladed weapons are covered by separate legislation and this guidance seeks to provide compliance with all the relevant legislation.

This guidance has been produced in consultation with the Metropolitan Police Firearms Enquiry & Licensing Team (SC&O19). It gives guidance on the management of weapons that are part of a theatrical production including rehearsals.

This document does not apply to events held outdoors or to any public place other than in a seated auditorium type venue, with the stage and performance area(s) specifically defined.

It does not cover the use of Pyrotechnics, Black-Powder (or Gunpowder) which are subject to licensing under the Explosives Act by the Local Authority as a separate matter; please see the ABTT Code of Practice for Pyrotechnics. Non-traditional theatre falls outside of the scope of this document. Please see the ABTT Guide to Non-Traditional Theatre

The ABTT gratefully acknowledge the help and support of Paul Wanklin and Tony Harley from the Royal National Theatre, Rob Barham and Zoe Phillips from the Royal Opera House, Gail Miller from the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Society of London Theatre, UK Theatre and various members of the ABTT for their input into this guidance.

Section 1 - Requirements

This guidance has been written to identify the simple scenario(s) and actions required for the general use of Weapons in Theatre.

Definitions

The **Producer** is the employer, organisation or person in overall control of the production activity.

Producer's Note is a document, created to confirm the need for weapons, their intended use including rehearsal, location of rehearsal and identifying their use in the production.

Responsible person is the person or persons named or identified in the Producers Note as being responsible for the control of all weapons within the premises for the purpose of rehearsal and performance.

A **weapon** includes any object which is designed for the purpose of inflicting bodily harm such as firearms, crossbows, catapults, any sharp-edged instruments used in a fight sequence (swords and knives) or martial arts weapons (such as rice flails) and batons, battering rams, swords, spears and longbows. This guidance also covers articles such as replica weapons and props which are not designed specifically for the purpose of inflicting bodily harm but which may pose such a risk when used as a weapon.

Weapons expert or competent person is someone who has the necessary knowledge, experience and training to advise on the use of the weapon. These may include Armourers, Swordmasters; Fight Arrangers, Fight Directors, Stunt Coordinators or martial arts experts

Justifying the use of weapons in performance.

Many theatrical performances identify or require by interpretation the need of the use of firearms and other weapons. At all times, the use of weapons should be supported by the creation of a 'Producers Note' that defines the requirement from the script or by definition of the script, the areas of use of the weapons, the stage, the auditorium the rehearsal room and other locations as may be required, who will use them and in what context they will be used.

The flowchart below summarises the 3 most common scenarios or options available to a Producer.

Flow chart and compliance

Script requires Firearms - Document the references in the script.		
Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Producer's Note created to confirm the need for such weapons, their intended use, including: rehearsal, location of rehearsal if not at the theatre, and if appropriate, identifying areas of use such as within the auditorium and not just the stage		
		
Required use of Prop weapons	Required use of realistic imitation and 'blank-firing' weapons	Required use of 'prohibited' weapons
		
Producer to create a Producer's Note as above.	Producer to create a Producer's Note as above.	Producer to create a Producer's Note as above plus identifying the supply, control and management of prohibited weapons through a specialist company (Registered Firearms Dealer with appropriate Section 5 License) under contract to supply, train, manage and control weapons
		
Establish procedures for the management and control of the 'props' including: training, control procedures including suitable storage and security provisions	Establish procedures for the management and control of such weapons including a register; issue and return documentation, training, control procedures and appropriate storage and security provisions	Implement the processes and controls identified by the specialist in compliance with the conditions stipulated in their License
		
Rehearse and perform		

As identified in the flowchart, there are 3 options to legally operate with weapons within the premises for the purposes of rehearsal and performance. At all times, a 'Producer's Note' is required to identify and defend the need for the use of any and all weapons:

Option 1; the Production includes the use of ‘prop’ weapons as a visual piece only. The Theatre will, under the guidance of or, with the support of a Competent Person, establish procedures for the management and control of the props including:

Training, control procedures including suitable storage and security provisions, training for handling weapons by Stage Managers and the handling and use of weapons by performers and the production of appropriate Risk Assessments.

Option2: A suitably skilled or trained person is identified to establish a Weapons Register, issue and return sheets, Control and Management Procedures, Training sheets for handling weapons by Stage Managers and other appointed persons and; for the handling and use of the weapons by Performers including the appropriate Risk Assessments. Records of training should be retained for a suitable period up to 12 months but no less than 3 months after the production closes.

Option 3; A specialist (someone Registered as a Firearms Dealer or RFD holding a Section 5 License) supplies, manages, and monitors the use of weapons on behalf of the production, wherein the weapons are brought to the venue, used in controlled and defined circumstances, collected and stored securely at the venue or removed daily, all under the control of the specialist as the ‘competent person’. This is perhaps a simpler and more effective method allowing the Producer to delegate many of the responsibilities and some liabilities identified within the law as the preferred method for touring shows.

Producer’s Note

The Producer’s Note, created to confirm and validate the need for the use of weapons can be created as a Word or other text document but will **always** comprise the following information:

The name of the show, the defined requirement or interpretation from the script, the scope of the use of the weapons including by listing, all areas where they will be used (rehearsal room, performance stage, specific areas of the auditorium).

The type of weapons to be used and how many; who and how many performers will handle weapons and where appropriate how many shots may be fired.

A Producer’s Note will also clearly specify the need for any person under the age of 18 to carry or handle any weapon, the reason and, context in relation to the script.

It must identify the ‘responsible person’ or ‘persons’ who will manage and maintain the weapons and the process to control their issue, return and safe storage.

A sample Producer’s Note is appended at the conclusion of this Guidance Note

NOTE: it is very important that every individual who will handle a weapon is considered or potentially ‘screened’ and found to be mentally stable, not naïve and not known to be a ‘fool’, the RFD, Armourer or other Competent Person issuing the weapon to an actor or other party retains the right to refuse issue and deny access to any weapons where in their opinion they feel an individual is not appropriate, ‘safe’ or suited to be in control of such weapon.

Section 2 - Responsibilities

Responsibility for health and safety rests with the employer and employees. The **employer** is taken to be the theatre, the Producer/production company or a specialist supplier. The term **Producer** is used to represent the employer, organisation or person in overall control of the production activity. It is the Producer who has overall control of the production and who must make sure that there are arrangements to:

- coordinate safety;
- direct action sequences safely;
- exchange information with others including the person in control of the weapon and other contractors, premises managers, freelancers and the self-employed.

The Producer should make sure that, if they do not believe that they are competent in terms of weapon handling, storage and control, then a competent person such as an Armourer/RFD and/or fight arranger is appointed as a competent person who:

- is competent and holds the necessary licenses;
- is provided with adequate information about the sequence to be performed;
- has provided a written assessment of the risks and identified the controls needed;
- has agreed to specify and/or supply the protective measures identified in the risk assessment.

The Producer should also make sure that:

- the controls identified in the risk assessment are put in place and communicated to those who may be affected;
- there is cooperation and communication with the owners or operators of the premises being used;
- there are adequate arrangements for emergencies.

The person in control of a firearm (the competent person) is responsible for:

- the safe use of the firearm - they should provide to the Producer, an assessment of the risks and controls for the safe use of the weapons;
- making sure anyone using a firearm is not legally **prohibited** from doing so for example Section 21 Possession of a firearm by persons previously convicted of crime (Archbold, 24.65). See Note below;
- the competence of the people who will handle the weapon, e.g. ensuring appropriate training is provided to actors;
- notifying the Producer about the danger areas and safe distances required for the sequence so that no one is at risk from discharge, either accidental or intentional;
- clear communication about the sequence and the safe arrangement of people and equipment, i.e. providing the briefing to all who may be affected;
- making sure that the protective measures identified are fit for purpose and used, e.g. screens, protective clothing and ear defenders.

The Producer should also make sure that the person directing the action:

- is competent;
- has assessed the risks of the sequence to be performed, and agreed any controls needed with the competent person and the actors;
- the risk to people involved;
- has scheduled time for rehearsals and safety briefings;
- has re-assessed the hazards and risks if any changes are proposed.

Competence

The person in control of weapons in the production must be sufficiently competent (having sufficient, skills, experience and knowledge). The level of expertise required will depend on the weapon(s) to be used and the circumstances of that use. Advice may be sought from;

- an armourer or
- a sword-master
- a fight director
- the props wrangler or stage manager

This list is not exhaustive.

Equity has compiled a list of fight directors commonly known as the Equity Theatre Fight Directors Register. The fight directors on the Equity Register have undertaken a programme of training and assessment. Currently, Equity recognises two organisations as being training and assessment providers - The British Academy of Dramatic Combat and the British Academy of Stage and Screen Combat. Other suitable training providers exist including; RC-Annie and Cutting-Edge Combat.

Individuals should be assessed by the person responsible for the safe use and operation of the weapons in the production to ensure they have the competence needed for the particular weapon and its use in the production activity. It is important to remember that the supplier of the weapon may not necessarily be competent in the use of the weapon.

Armourers & Registered Firearms Dealers (RFD's)

An armourer should be engaged where a firearm that requires a license or certificate is to be held or used by someone who is not working within the privileges of their own license, such as an actor. The armourer must be competent and experienced in such work.

NOTE: Holding licenses or shotgun and firearm certificates does not qualify a person to be an armourer or allow them to be the competent person for a theatre or show.

The privileges of each license will determine the limits on the firearm's storage, transportation and use. The holders are only allowed to operate within their privileges of license, e.g. at a shooting club or as part of an organised event.

Performers

The experience, skills and competence of the performers using the weapons must be considered. The Producer must seek the advice of the relevant weapons expert to make sure that adequate information; instruction and training are given to all those involved with, or affected by, the use of the weapon. All production personnel **must** follow the instructions.

Hazards

The following hazards are associated with the use of firearms and weapons within a production;

- **flying objects**, e.g. the projectile (arrow, bolt etc) and incidental flying objects such as spent cases ejected from automatic and semi-automatic firearms. Spent cases may be hot and can travel several metres;

- **blast and impact** injury caused by burning gases, unburned propellant, wadding and debris discharged from the barrel and any other hazards caused by the discharge of blank ammunition, see below;
- unintentional **discharge** of weapons and contact injury or wounding with weapons such as swords and lances caused by, for example;
- **inexperience** of users (artists, extras etc);
- **fatigue**;
- **environment** - use in difficult circumstances i.e. when negotiating a complex set and scenery or when subject to awkward and restrictive movement such as in a confined area.
- **noise** levels from discharging blank ammunition is often in excess of 100 dB (A);
- **burns**, smoke;
- **laser** sights;
- **costumes** that may restrict movement;
- **sharp edges/splinters** created during the intended destruction of wooden weapon handles during combat scenes.

Blank ammunition

Blank ammunition is dangerous and can inflict serious injury as the wadding and debris can cover considerable distances. There is a lethal risk from the pieces of brass crimping or the wadding from an open-ended cartridge being projected/ejected. The armourer or supplier will advise on suitability of ammunition.

Precautionary measures

The following precautionary measures are some of the controls that can be put in place to manage the risks associated with the use of weapons on a production; the degree of controls required is relative to the level of risk associated with the use of weapons.

- a) Clear safety zones - suitable marking and rigorous policing of exclusion zones to ensure unauthorised persons cannot enter the danger areas. These areas should consider intended lines of fire or throw and potentially hazardous areas created by resultant debris (cartridge cases, wadding etc)
- b) All weapons and ammunition must be accounted for at all times and kept secure. The security of firearms is the responsibility of the License holder or, where appointed, the competent person. They are to make sure:
 - firearms, except when in actual use, are secured appropriately;
 - ammunition and firearms travel in separate, locked containers. This includes blank ammunition and replicas;
 - firearms and ammunition are safe and secure at all times, including during rehearsal and performances (particularly in consideration of touring shows)
- c) The Producer should assess which employees are likely to be exposed to noise levels above the lower exposure action value as defined in the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 and take such measures as are necessary to meet the requirements of those Regulations. These will include suitable ear-plugs for actors and other performers and in-ear moulded products for crew, SM's and cast on tours.

- d) Firearms are to be pointed at persons **only** when strictly necessary and the competent person in control of the weapon has confirmed that the necessary risk control measures are in place and that there has been adequate rehearsal.
- e) The competent person must be able at all times of weapon use to observe the use of the weapon and monitor the action to ensure that their instructions are followed.
- f) Where the risk assessment identifies the need for a protective clear screen for performers or others necessarily in a potentially dangerous area, the material must be fit for purpose. Eye protection alone will not normally be adequate. Information on the type and extent of the dangers created by the weapons in use should be provided to all those likely to be affected.
- g) Comprehensive training in the use of the weapons is to be provided to those using them.
- h) All weapons should be blunted unless there is a specific action sequence requiring a cutting action. Points can be visually realistic while still being blunt. Wooden, plastic or rubber weapons can be hazardous if used in a stabbing or lunging mode and soft-tipped weapons will often be a safer and equally acceptable alternative.
- i) Replica swords should be manufactured in such a way that they are correctly balanced when in use. They should be of sound construction. In fight scenes, weapon blades should be of the same material, e.g. a steel sword should be used only against a steel sword, not one of aluminium.
- j) Weapons with retractable parts (where NOT prohibited) should operate smoothly and be appropriately lubricated.
- k) Costumes/garments should fit the individual performer correctly to ensure that the wearer can move around properly and that any weapon/firearm can be used safely. This should include headgear and any footwear. Items worn on the head should not restrict the performer's vision, including their peripheral vision.
- l) Performers who may be carrying out physically strenuous action should 'warm up' beforehand.
- m) Adequate time is to be allowed for rehearsal, in particular where understudies may be required. Adequate rest time should be provided to reduce the risk of error due to fatigue.

Faults and misfires

If any weapon develops a fault, it must be immediately withdrawn from use. It should not be used again until a competent person has declared it safe.

Condition of weapons

The competent person must make sure that all weapons are inspected before use, at regular periods such as during breaks and after use. The visual inspection should look for defects such as loosening of components, rivets etc and damage such as hairline cracks, indentation and chipping of blades etc.

Notification to the police

It may be advisable to discuss the use of weapons on stage with the local Police liaison to the venue prior to arrival to gauge their understanding and to address any concerns they may have.

If a firearm or edged/bladed replica or deactivated weapon is to be used in, heard or seen in (or from) a public place, the Producer must make sure that the police have been fully informed and that a point of contact for them is nominated, e.g. the armourer. Keeping the police informed will prevent possible misunderstandings involving police armed response units and reduce the likelihood of public distress and possible breach of the peace. Effective communication of what you intend to do, how you intend to do it and where, for how long and to whom should all be a part of the Producers Note relating to the script.

Section 3 - Weapons Procedures & Controls

Storage

1. When not in use, all firearms must be securely stored in a locked suitable container (preferably a gun safe) in the theatre in accordance with the recommendations of the competent person (as authorised on the issued Firearms License and as identified by the Police).
2. Ammunition (blanks) must be stored separately from the firearms.
3. Firearms must not be left unattended at any time.
4. Firearms must be kept unloaded at all times, other than immediately prior to their being used either in rehearsal or on stage or for practice purposes.
5. The Competent person shall be solely responsible for supplying the appropriate blank ammunition for firearms.
6. No member of staff may arrange for pyrotechnics or firearms to be brought onto theatre premises without obtaining the prior approval of the Competent Person.
7. The storage of firearms, ammunition, other weapons and pyrotechnics must comply with any additional licensing requirements identified by the Local Authority.
8. Firearms which are being used in rehearsals must be stored in the locked cupboards available in rehearsal rooms when they are not actually in use (see 1 above).

Firearms being used during rehearsal and performance

9. No firearms will be used during the rehearsal or performance of a production unless the requirement for their use has been discussed and agreed with the Competent Person.
10. Before the opening of a production in which firearms are to be used there will be a meeting to assess the use of firearms in the production involving:
 - The Competent Person
 - Production Manager
 - The Armourer (if appointed)
 - The Stage Manager of the production.
11. This meeting will assess whether the use of firearms will require the following:
 - a. The presence of an Armourer to fire or supervise the firing of weapons.
 - b. The handling and firing of the weapons by members of the Company or Stage Management without the presence of an Armourer.
12. The Competent person remains responsible for all weapons that have Section 1 and 2 status. i.e. all weapons that are covered by the terms and conditions of a Firearms Licence.
13. Weapons that have been de-activated in accordance with the Firearms (Amendment) Act of 1988 (as amended) and weapons that have been made specifically for blanks and dummy or replica weapons may be the responsibility in a performance of a member of Stage Management.
14. Performers (including understudies) required to use firearms on stage must be instructed before they use it on stage. They will be given time to practice using the firearm in a secure area of the theatre under the instruction of a competent person. No member of the company or Stage Management will be authorised to fire a weapon in rehearsal or performance unless they have completed their training to the satisfaction of the competent person.

15. Where the competent person is present for the firing of a weapon in performance, they will be responsible for setting the firearm and, if required, will fire the weapon at the appropriate point in the performance.
16. Where an actor is required to fire the weapon, the competent person will load and hand the firearm to the actor and after its use will immediately unload and check the working condition of the firearm. Where, by virtue of the nature of the performance, the competent person cannot have direct contact with the performer over the firing of the weapon, the performer will hand the weapon to a member of Stage Management who will hand it to and receive it back from the performer.
17. During rehearsals, the venting direction of the firearm must be established and the person using the firearm must be made aware of this.
18. Venting must not be towards either the operator or the other persons on stage, and the discharge must be directed into a safe area away from the public, performers and staff. Firearms must never be aimed directly at either the audience or any person on stage.
19. Where it is decided that there is no need for the competent person to be present for the firing of a weapon in rehearsal or performance, then the responsibility for this will be vested in the Stage Management team of the production concerned. No member of the Stage Management team will be given such responsibility without receiving appropriate training from the competent person. Once it has been agreed that the competent person will not be in attendance then he/she will draw up a written procedure which will detail the arrangements to be made for the storage and handling of the weapons concerned. Stage Management will then be required to sign for and strictly follow this written procedure.
20. Weapons, which are being used in performance where the competent person is not present, must be stored in a secure manner. Such weapons must be kept in a locked purpose-built gun cabinet/gun safe and only taken to the stage when required. Weapons must be returned to the cabinet/safe when they have been finished with on stage.
21. In the absence of the designated member of Stage Management, the duties and responsibility set out in paragraphs 11 and 12 above will fall on the nominated Stage Manager for the performance who will have received training for such an eventuality.
22. Under no circumstances must any person who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs or, is considered to be of an unsound mind have a firearm in their possession for any purpose.
23. At the end of the performance where responsibility for firearms has been delegated to the Stage Management of the production concerned, they will place the firearms in the gun safe which will have been provided for this purpose off-stage in the theatre and ensure that it is locked.
24. All those who have responsibility for the use of firearms and weapons including replicas, (performers, stage management and competent person), in rehearsal or performance to be made fully aware at the beginning of rehearsals of the strict firearm control procedures in operation and the likely implications of loss should any such item not be returned at the end of the rehearsal or performance.

Loss or suspected loss must be reported to the competent person immediately and the Police may be contacted. All relevant persons are likely to be delayed in the area until the item has been recovered. The theatre may undertake searches for items that are considered to be stolen in such circumstances.

Firearms Briefing

Introduction. The purpose of this information is to provide consistent and documented information on the methods of control and management of firearms - either blank firing, realistic-imitation or deactivated.

Purpose of the briefing. The purpose of the briefing is to train actors, performers, Production and Stage management and certify them as safe and competent to handle and operate the weapons at the Theatre.

Structure of the Course. While undergoing training you will be supervised one-to-one by a competent person from the Theatre or a specialist contractor. Training will take place mostly during rehearsal days. Practical instruction will be given during coached sessions

There is an expectation that actors and performers will have received professional instruction from specialists such as RC-Annie, the British Academy of Stage and Screen Combat or hold the European Certificate of Skilled Performance Combat or similar.

Assessment. You will be continually assessed during training on your attitude to safety and your knowledge of the procedures used in the Theatre.

Firearm Safety Briefing

Safety and Security

Firearms ownership. Possession of firearms is strictly controlled in the UK. The police administer the Firearms Licensing system.

Safety. You must know the firearm safety rules and procedures and demonstrate safety awareness at all times when handling and using the weapons. You will attend the daily safety briefing before each rehearsal and or performance.

Security. You must understand the need for firearm security. The rules below are listed below:

Never leave firearms unattended or on view when in a public place Never handle another person's firearms without permission. Never leave firearms (or ammunition) unattended in the rehearsal room.

Non-threatening – you must keep your firearm pointing down at all times. Except when performing a set piece.

State of Mind – performing well is much easier if you are in a calm relaxed state of mind.

Position & hold - must be firm enough and support the weapon

For example:

For a Rifle

The left arm should be as close under the rifle as possible (for right handers)

Clothing and Costume must be tight enough to allow a full range of movement; loose clothing can become snagged or entangled in a weapon

The left hand should only support and not grip (right hand for left handers)

The rifle should be locked in without right hand grip (left hand for left handers)

And for a Pistol

The left hand should be used as support under the Pistol grip (to be clear of any vent) (for right handers)

Clothing/Costume must be tight enough to allow a full range of movement

The left hand should support and not grip (right hand for left handers)

Firing and follow through

1. Firearm held firmly and body relaxed
2. Ball of trigger finger on trigger
3. The only thing to move is the end of the trigger finger
4. Release trigger at the end of the natural breathing cycle
5. Squeeze the trigger and hold the pressure until the firearm stops "bouncing about"

Loading, Firing and Unloading for Blank Firing Weapons

ALL loading and unloading is undertaken by the competent person (CP) or their deputy NOT the performer

1. Only load prior to required use
2. Ensure that the firearm is pointed down and away from people, preferably in an empty area or room

3. When ready to handover weapon to the recipient, confirm “loaded”
4. When finished the performer will invite the CP to inspect firearm to confirm “finished”
5. Remove firearm(s) to the gun-safe or armoury as appropriate

Misfire Procedure.

1. Stay on aim for at least 5 seconds (count it!)
2. Point firearm at floor (remember where the vent is)
3. Move off-stage and hand firearm to CP
4. CP takes firearm to unoccupied safe area to investigate

For realistic and deactivated firearms – non-firing

1. Sign for firearm from CP
2. Keep firearm pointed to the floor or ‘holstered’ as necessary
3. Undertake rehearsal or performance
4. Return to CP
5. NEVER leave the firearm on its own
6. NEVER point it at someone even in jest
7. NEVER ‘lend’ it to another person

Section 4 - Edged Weapons on Stage

Edged Weapons are included in many plays, musicals, pantomimes, operas and other stage productions. It is, however, illegal to carry a weapon of any kind in any circumstances. The Producer, choreographer, stage manager, props people and cast need to understand the implications of the use of any kind of weapon or dummy weapon in performance and should ask themselves the question:

Do we really need weapons in our production?

If a weapon is needed to comply with the script, then this information sheet may help you. However, if it is being used only as a costume accessory then it should be considered whether one is actually required. There are some scripts which refer to a specific weapon - a swordstick (*Sherlock Holmes*), flick knife (*Oklahoma*, *West Side Story*) - so at an early stage in rehearsals, ways should be found of getting around any problems.

Definition of an edged weapon

Any weapon with an edge or point, e.g. swords, spears, halberds, knives, daggers, pikestaffs, even a kitchen knife if it has an edge or point.

Banned illegal weapons

Swordsticks, Kung-Fu items, flick knives, spring-operated blades and a list of similar items are now banned. The Law states 'it is illegal to have in your possession any edged or pointed weapon in a 'public place', such as a theatre.

It should be noted that the person who will be prosecuted is the person actually handling the weapon. They could claim that they were under instruction to use or carry the weapon implicating the Producer.

Having decided that it is necessary to use weapons (Producers Note)

The Producer must contact the Police in whose area the theatre/performing space is situated, explaining the intention, how the use of weapons is necessary to the script, and reassuring them as to security. It is best to create this information in writing **and** receive confirmation in writing from the Police stating their agreement to allow the use of the items.

All weapons should be confined to the stage and backstage area and there must be strict security to prevent the general public having access to these areas. It may well be stating the obvious that the actors cannot carry weapons in any area where the general public is. For instance, the cast should not carry weapons down the aisles and through the audience to go up on to the stage unless this has been agreed [with the Police and Licensing Authority].

Outdoor performances

If the performances are outdoors, the police will need additional assurances that the general public cannot get near the weapons. There will also be extra problems with security when the weapon is not in use (for example, locking the weapon in the boot of a car may not be deemed to be secure storage). A less obvious example would be where a Producer puts a float in a local carnival advertising its next production; any carrying of weapons would be illegal under the terms of the Act.

Nominated person

A person over 18 years of age and who is not directly involved with other aspects of the production should be nominated to be responsible for the weapons. This person should carry the weapons from the storage area to the stage, should issue them, collect them back as they come off stage and return them to the storage area. The cast should not take them back to dressing rooms.

Storage

All weapons should be secured under TWO keys, say in a locked cupboard within a locked office. It is not necessary to put them in a safe, merely 'a secure area'.

Safety

All weapons must have both the edges and points ground off to remove any sharp edge or point. The Law does not define exactly what an edge or point is, nor does it identify the construction material; Wooden or plastic swords with an edge or point could be deemed to be a weapon.

Fighting or non-fighting weapons

If any weapon is to be used for fighting (no matter how the fight is staged) allow plenty of time to source these items and arrange secure storage. If 'fighting weapons' are to be used it is best to hire a professional fight arranger who will almost invariably bring his/her own weapons; however, it is virtually impossible to 'hire' fighting swords.

Insurance

It is highly unlikely that a Producer or Theatre (Venue) can insure against the risk of prosecution where the use of weapons is concerned. If is possible, it likely to be financially prohibitive. But it is obvious that the company must be adequately covered for any accident or injury involving weapons. We would strongly recommend that each Producer and Theatre (Venue) examine their existing insurance policy to ensure that adequate '*member to member*' liability cover is in place. In addition, a check with your current insurers that it acceptable to them that this type of activity to takes place and is covered by the current policy.

Risk assessment

This must be a specific assessment of each production and include all the times that weapons are involved, from transport, initial delivery, storage, rehearsals, through to the actual performances. The risk assessment should also cover lockable storage and include the nominated persons.

FAQ's

- Q I have a replica firearm in my theatre that fires 'blanks', do I need a Firearms License for this?
- A *No, but you do need to control and manage any such weapons as set out in this guidance document.*
- Q I am taking 2 realistic imitation pistols to the rehearsal studio, can I carry them in my briefcase or pockets of my coat?
- A *No. Ideally, they should be in a separate box or carrier preferably in the boot of a car or within a van preferably with 2 or more persons in the vehicle. They should not be carried on public transport and should remain unseen at all times. Blank ammunition should be stored securely and separately to the weapon(s). Realistic weapons should NEVER be concealed about your person, if seen and reported, the police will respond appropriately.*
- Q I have a lot of 'blank' ammunition left over from some previous shows but no blank firing firearms, what should I do?
- A *You can ask the supplier or another Registered Firearms Dealer (RFD) to purchase it or remove it for you. If you intend to keep it, you do need to tell your insurer and manage it by keeping it under separate lock and key from any other firearms (be they realistic imitation or otherwise) as described above and in your management and control of weapons procedures.*
- Q I have several crossbows and some longbows in our store, what do I do with them?
- A *As weapons they are required to be stored in a locked cabinet and the ammunition (bolts and arrows) secured in a separate locked cabinet. This principle applies to all weapons.*
- Q Our Armourer is leaving; he or she is the named person on the Firearms Certificate what do we do now?
- A *Contact the local police and inform them. They will discuss your options and find a practical solution. A theatre can hold a firearms certificate without employing an Armourer.*
- Q We have had a clearing out and found a retractable bladed knife, what do we do with it?
- A *A prop knife is fine, make sure it is stored securely and safely. However, if it is not a prop knife call your local police liaison and let them know. You will receive their support and advice.*
- Q I am taking a show on tour and we have 20 realistic firearms in the show. What do I do and who do I tell?
- A *It is important to let the destination theatres or venues know about the weapons and that they are realistic imitations. They will have contacts in the local police force and can put you in touch with them to confirm the scope of their use and the control processes that you will be using on the tour.*
- Q A realistic-imitation firearm has been lost in leaving one venue on the tour and arriving at the next, what should we do?
- A *Contact the police and let them know. You will have (should have) already had some contact prior to arriving they will be aware of your tour. They may investigate the incident in some detail and will require access to the people involved in the securing of the weapons and transportation to the new venue.*

- Q We need swords and guns for a World War 1 piece on stage, how do we obtain them?
- A *A Props Company will generally identify a solution. They will have access to Fight Arrangers, Armourers and other competent people to make this happen for you.*
- Q We are a regional Theatre that own a lot of mixed weapons, swords, handguns, bayonets, muskets and rifles used in our own productions, we are not license holders or armourers - what should we do?
- A *Contact the local police and ask for their help; they will assist in making sure that you are compliant, they will also identify any Registered Firearms Dealers in the area that can help achieve the security and storage requirements if needed and assist in compiling and developing the control procedures for the weapons.*

References:

The primary reference material was sourced from the following publications free to download from the internet and the kind help and assistance of the identified sources:

Home Office 'Guidance on Firearms Licensing Law - March 2015'

Home Office 'Firearms Security Handbook 2005'

Firearms Act 1968

Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988

Firearms (Amendment) Regulations 2010

Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 (as amended)

The Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 (Realistic Imitation Firearms) Regulations 2007

Crime and Security Act 2010

Criminal Justice Act 1988

HSE Guidance 'Management of firearms and weapons in film and TV Productions.'

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/etis20.pdf

Metropolitan Police Firearms Enquiry Team

Paul Wanklin – Senior Armourer at the Royal National Theatre, London

Appendix 1.

Example of a preliminary notification regarding the use of weapons

Email:

From: xxxx xxxx (Artistic Director)
To: xxxx xxxx (Safety Consultant)
Cc: xxxx xxxx (Production Manager), xxxx xxxx (Stage Manager)

Subject: Blank to be fired on stage during production of xxxxx

Hi xxxx,

We need to discuss the use of a blank firing revolver on stage for xxxx xxxx xxxx xxxx, the script asks for 2 shots to be fired in the kitchen scene, they are fired into the air and not at anyone, it's a high stress moment important to the context of the story. What more do you need from us? Our plan is as follows:

The show runs for 6 weeks with 6 performances per week

Stage Manager will manage the Weapon and blanks in line with our written process

Training will be given to the Actress regarding the use of the weapon from the company we are hiring it from.

We need to undertake a Noise Assessment during rehearsals at the Theatre (we have not done this before).

We will arrange for xxxx xxxx from xxxx Licensing to appear when we do the noise assessment in the xxxx Theatre, they have agreed in principle.

We have a stock of ear plugs from the last time assuming a similar loudness?

The crew, cast and theatre tech staff are aware of the gunshots.

We will use clear signage in the foyer and will add the shots to the website for people to be aware when purchasing tickets.

Appendix 2.

Weapons Used in a Production	Sample Checklist for production of a Producer's Note
Production	Insert name of Production here
Producer	Give full details of Production Company and full contact details
Dates of rehearsal	
Rehearsal location(s)	Give full location name and postcode
Responsible person during rehearsals	Give name and address and full contact details
Dates of performance	
Performance Location(s) and Date(s)	Give full location name and postcode
Justification(s) for using Weapons in this Production	For example, give script references/historical context/prior performances or productions detail.
Types of Weapons	Accurate and legal descriptions of types of weapons
List of weapons used in this Production	Full list of all Weapons used.
Weapons obtained and from whom	Give name(s) and address(es) and full contact details

Competent Person details	Give name(s) and address(es) and full contact details
Stage Management team list	Give name(s) and address(es) and full contact details
Location of locked Weapons storage	
Security methods for Weapons storage	
List of persons who have access to Weapons Store	
Location of locked ammunition storage	
Security methods for ammunition storage	
List of persons who have access to Ammunition Store	
List of performers using Weapons	Names and roles

Details of training given to performers and by whom?	
Have Local Police been informed?	Give Details
Special precautions to be noted:	
What happens to the Weapons at end of the run of Production?	
Notes:	
Prepared by:	Insert name, date and job title.
Amended by:	Insert name, date and job title.
Amended by:	Insert name, date and job title.