

York Mystery Plays Supporters Trust Weapon Use Policy

York Mystery Plays Supporters Trust recognises that the use of firearms and weapons in live theatre productions can carry significant risk if they are faulty, are used incorrectly or if they fall into the wrong hands. The Trustees at York Mystery Plays Supporters Trust (YMPST) will ensure that they use people that are competent in all aspects of their provision and use. In most cases this responsibility will fall to the Production team, namely the Director, Producer and Stage Manager/Waggon Master. Responsibility for risk assessment rests with the Production team who are accountable to YMPST. This requires the Production team to consider what things in the production may cause harm to people and to take such steps as are necessary to eliminate or reduce the risk to acceptable levels. The risks from the use of firearms and weapons must be assessed and controlled in the same way as any other risk to the health and safety of those involved in the production.

It is expected that the Production team will continually assess the effectiveness of any controls they have in place and monitor their surroundings to make sure any changes will not affect the safe use of weapons or firearms. The Waggon Master has the authority to stop work on the production if a risk to people becomes apparent and he/she should ensure that the Production team is aware of any changes they believe are necessary to ensure the safety of crew, performers and the audience/public.

YMPST applies the following controls as standard when firearms and weaponry are used in their theatrical productions.

1. Ensure people in charge of firearms and weapons have the appropriate levels of training and competence required to ensure safe use.
2. Ensure receiving venues on tour are aware that weapons or firearms are being used.
3. Regular inspection of firearms/weapons during the production to make sure they remain in safe condition.
4. Put in place procedures to withdraw and make safe misfired firearms.
5. Ensure appropriate safeguards are in place if weapons are discharged or aimed at people.
6. Ensure all involved in the production have received adequate briefing about the use of and risks from firearms and weapons.
7. Protect crews and, where possible, actors and other exposed members of the production crew with screens/buffers etc where they cannot be remote from the action.
9. Ensure good sightlines for those supervising the use of the firearms/weapons to ensure their safe use.

10. Provide adequate time and resources for rehearsals, safety briefings and reappraisal of controls – this is especially important if the people handling weapons are inexperienced.
11. Provide adequate emergency cover to cope with foreseeable events, eg first aid.
12. Choose the least hazardous firearm/weapon suitable, e.g .use a replica rather than a real firearm where possible, blunted rather than sharp edged blades etc.
13. Control noise and reduce the numbers of people exposed to it.
14. Provide secure storage arrangements for firearms, ammunition and weapons during transit and when not in use.
15. Where deployed, provide secure storage for ammunition, separate from the firearms – live and blank ammunition should never be mixed and should be stored in separate containers.
15. Ensure appropriate weapons are used and that the risks from them are minimised:
 1. bladed weapons are blunted
 2. soft-tipped weapons are preferable to wooden or plastic alternatives.
 3. weapon blades must be of the same material in fight scenes, eg steel with steel.

Hazards

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

1. flying objects, eg projectiles (arrows, bolts 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.
2. blast and impact injury caused by projectiles, burning gases, unburned propellant, wadding and debris discharged from weapons – all of these hazards apply to live and blank ammunition.
3. unintentional discharge of weapons.
4. noise levels from discharging ammunition – both blank and live is often in excess of 100 dB(A).
5. smoke.
6. laser light from weapon sights.

7. sharp edges/splinters created during the intended destruction of wooden weapon handles during combat scenes.

8. Contact injury or wounding from weapons such as swords and lances caused for example by:

1. Inexperienced users (actors, extras etc).
2. Fatigue.
3. ill-fitting costumes and helmets that may restrict movement or visibility.
4. Use in difficult circumstances, i.e. when negotiating difficult ground cover or when subject to awkward and restricted areas on set.

Notification to the Police:

If a firearm/weapon is to be used, or could be seen or heard in a public place, the Production team must ensure that the police force in the area is informed. Details of the notification must be kept by the Production team. All members of the production crew and anyone likely to be handling firearms or weapons must be briefed on what to do if a police armed response team arrives on site.

Signed: *Linda Terry* **(Chair)**

Date of adoption: 22.08.18

Production specific notes: the Harrowing of Hell September 2018

The Harrowing of Hell will make use of a decommissioned Webley .455 revolver. The following plans and safeguards will be put in place throughout the production:

1. Copies of the certificate of deactivation will be kept with the weapon at all times, as proof that the weapon is unable to fire.
2. No ammunition, dummy or live, will be used at any time. The wagon master will check the weapon before the first performance of each day to ensure that all chambers are empty.
3. The weapon is never 'fired' on stage, and there is no simulated gunshot sound of any kind.
4. The weapon is never visible while the wagon and cast are in transit from one site to another. During this time it will be kept in a secure box on the wagon, or in another secure location as determined by the wagon master.
5. The weapon will be visible to the audience at two points only during the play. Both instances take place on the wagon platform, and the weapon is never pointed at the audience.
6. The weapon will be transported in a secure container by the director and given to the wagon master before the first performance, or rehearsal, of the day. The wagon master will then oversee the handling of the weapon and will place in the secure box on the wagon when appropriate to do so.
7. At the end of the performance or rehearsal day, the wagon master will return the weapon to the director and the director will take it away in a secure container.