



## EDGED WEAPONS ON STAGE

Weapons (and guns, not covered by this factsheet) 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 Society committee, 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 factsheet 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 sword stick (*Sherlock Holmes*), flick knife (*Oklahoma*, *West Side Story*) - so at an early stage in rehearsals, ways should be found of getting round any problems.

### CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT

All edged or pointed weapons come under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1988 Section 139 Subsections 1-3 together with Subsections 4 & 5 covering lawful authority for possession of such weapons.

### DEFINITION OF AN EDGED WEAPON

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

### BANNED ILLEGAL WEAPONS

Sword sticks, kung fu items, flick knives, spring-operated blades and a list of similar items are now banned and should be handed into a police station. A brief summary of this Act says 'it is illegal to have in your possession any edged or pointed weapon in a public place', and most people would say that a theatre is 'a public place'. It should be noted

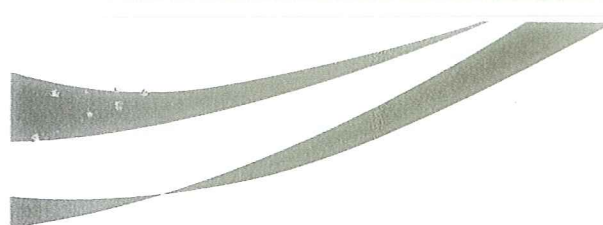
*noda*

Professional support for amateur theatre

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that the person who will be prosecuted is the person actually handling the weapon. He/she could however claim that he/she was under instruction to use or carry the weapon so implicating the Society.

## HAVING DECIDED THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO USE WEAPONS

The Society must contact the Police in whose area the theatre/performing space is situated, explaining what is the intention, how the use of weapons is necessary to the script, and reassuring them as to security. It is best to get 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 cannot carry weapons down the aisles and through the audience to go up on to the stage

## 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, where guns are concerned, locking the weapon in the boot of a car is NOT deemed secure storage). A less obvious example would be where a Society 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

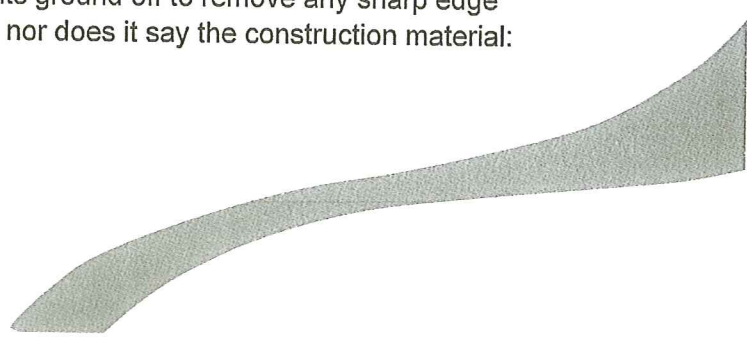
A person over 18 years of age and who is not directly involved with other aspects of the production should be nominated to be responsible for the weapons. This person should carry the weapons from the storage area to the stage, should issue them, collect them back as they come off stage and return them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

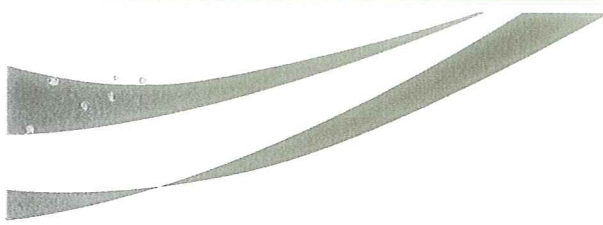
## STORAGE

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 Act does not define edge or point, nor does it say 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; it is virtually impossible to 'hire' fighting swords.

## INSURANCE

It is not thought that a Society can insure against the risk of prosecution where the use of weapons is concerned or if it can, it would be financially prohibitive. But it is obvious that the Society must be adequately covered for any accident or injury involving weapons. We would strongly recommend that each Society check their existing insurance policy to ensure that adequate "member to member" liability cover is in place, as in the NODA Insurance policy. In addition you should check that your insurers are happy for this type of activity to take place and is acceptable under your policy terms.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

This must be carried out unique to each production and include all the times weapons are involved, from transport, initial delivery, storage, rehearsals, through to the actual production. The risk assessment must also cover lockable storage and nominated persons.

## ADDITIONAL ADVICE

It is recommended that you obtain and read an HSE Information sheet No 20. 'Management of firearms and other weapons in productions'. It is free of charge and obtainable from HSE Books or [www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk) Remember that this leaflet also covers Film, TV, etc but will be extremely useful when preparing your Risk Assessment.

**Note:** Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this factsheet it is not intended to be a complete guide to the law. Societies should seek appropriate advice on specific problems before any action is taken.

Prepared for NODA by Howorth Wrightson Ltd  
contact your Area Councillor or Regional Representative for advice.

