



Stunt Safety

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Which of the following should be considered a stunt?

- diving off a cliff
- falling down a staircase
- a staged fist fight
- a car chase
- a motorcycle jump
- performing with large animals
- doing tricks while riding a horse
- jumping out of an airplane

A stunt is *"any action sequence that involves possible injury to performers or others."* Using this definition, all of the above examples of action sequences should be considered stunts because they involve risk to the performers or others.

Carrying out a stunt safely requires careful advance planning. Any action sequences should be evaluated by independent, qualified experts to determine their potential for injury. In cases of high risk, there should be a determination as to whether the stunt could be modified, or whether it should be done at all. Once all these preliminary steps have been carried out, then it is necessary to develop the actual procedures needed to carry out the stunt safely.

Evaluation of the Risk

The degree of risk is going to depend on the nature of the action sequence, who could be injured, and the nature of the potential injuries. For example, jumping over a gorge on a motorcycle is inherently more dangerous than falling down a flight of stairs. Note, however, that both stunts could potentially cause serious injury.

In both these instances, the likelihood of bystanders being injured is minimal under normal circumstances. However, consider a high speed car chase in traffic. The drivers and passengers in the cars involved in the actual chase are obviously at high risk. But everyone near and around the cars are also at high risk because of the chance of misjudgments and accidents.

Evaluation of the Stunt

In many instances, the basic questions should be asked: *"Is the stunt worth the risk? Can it be carried out effectively? Should it be modified?"*

These questions can only be answered after all safety factors have been considered.

Who Performs the Stunt?

The question is simple: *What qualifications are needed to participate in a stunt?* Obviously qualified stuntpeople should be carrying out the dangerous—or potentially dangerous—elements of a stunt. The use of untrained volunteers in most stunts should be eliminated due to the inherent risk.

Stunt Safety Procedures

Obviously each type of stunt will have its own detailed precautions, but there are some general guidelines that should apply to all stunts:

1. There should be adequate access to emergency medical care, fire protection, etc. The extent of on-site emergency medical facilities and personnel would depend on the distance to adequate hospital facilities, availability of emergency transportation, number of people on the location, and the degree of risk of the stunt.
2. Safety procedures for stunts should be in writing and discussed well in advance of the stunt with all participating personnel.
3. Before workers are hired, they should be made aware that a stunt will be performed with trained professionals, and also be aware of any potential risks.
4. When possible, all stunts should be rehearsed in dry runs without the risk. Everyone involved should be clear as to their roles in the stunt.
5. All nonessential personnel should be kept clear of the area where the stunt is being performed.
6. Special procedures should be taken to protect the audience, crew, and anyone else who may be near the stunt.
7. There should be an absolute minimum number of repetitions of the stunt to avoid tiring the performers or unnecessary risk to the workers.

Decision Making

One of the most important aspects of planning and carrying out a stunt is who is responsible for safety in planning the stunt and during the actual performance. Usually, a stunt coordinator should have absolute control over whether the stunt proceeds or not, and over all safety procedures. The stunt coordinator should not participate in the actual stunt since it is impossible to properly supervise all aspects of a stunt if that person has other responsibilities.

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- excerpt from *Art Hazards News* Vol 11., No. 10