

HOT TIP**10 WAYS TO PRACTICE SAFE SETS**

Hey, clearly, I am Mr. Down and Dirty when it comes to production. I believe in doing whatever you gotta do to get the shot and finish the project, but I draw a clear and distinct line when it comes to safety on set. Stealing a location or risking arrest is one thing, but risking your (or anyone else's) personal safety for the sake of a film or even a very well-paying music video or commercial is just plain stupid. And when serious accidents happen, it's never worth the shot. Read on for my tips to stay clear of this scenario and always practice "safe sets."

Risking safety for the sake of a shot is NOT "Down and Dirty." It's just plain dumb!

1 DON'T BE STUPID

A fan once sent me a picture of some guerrilla filmmakers she saw on the side of the road that are the very essence of what I don't believe in. These filmmaking fools were 100 feet off the ground; on the wrong side of a highway overpass; and completely unsecured by a tether, safety chain, and apparently, also by common sense. Let me be clear here: This type of stuff is **NOT** "Down and Dirty." It's just sheer "dumbassery." I really can't put it any other way. Your camera and brain should always be fully engaged—at the same time—when it comes to filmmaking.



Witness two filmmaking idiots risking their lives to get a shot from the open ledge of a highway bridge 100+ feet off the ground. This ain't Down and Dirty filmmaking; it's just dumb.

2 SLOW IT DOWN

The pressure on a film set can be tremendous when the dollars are ticking away on a piece of equipment due back at the rental house, you're about to lose that last bit of golden sunlight, or the lead actor has to leave in two hours to catch a plane. These are the panic times. Bad things are more likely to happen when everyone is tense and rushing to get things done. Remember, the best filmmakers panic only on the *inside*, so take a deep breath and mentally (if not physically) slow down the pace long enough to make sure that everyone is still safe, because if they aren't, you still won't get the shot; plus you'll have a whole new set of problems to deal with. As Kanye West put it, "Drive slow, Homey. You never know, Homey."

p0065

p0070

p0080

p0075

s0020

p0085

LIGHTING: GETTING YA SHINE ON | 105

f0010

p0090

s0025

p0095

s0030

p0100

3 ALWAYS KEEP A FIRST-AID KIT ON SET

Even in the safest of environments, little accidents can and will happen—cuts, bruises, burns, and such. When these things do happen, be prepared with the basic supplies to take care of the people who take care of you: your talent and crew. When a gaffer slices his palm trying to set up a light for your scene, it's so much classier and caring to have a large bandage and some Neosporin on hand than to have the poor guy walking around the rest of the shoot with a blood-soaked paper towel held on by a piece of gaffer's tape. Apart from bandages and standard medical supplies like rubbing alcohol to clean and treat basic wounds, you also want to stock things like instant hot and cold packs, BenGay, tweezers, gauze, aspirin, or ibuprofen (lots of it), cold and allergy medicine, and relief for upset stomachs...whatever you keep in your medicine cabinet. You can get a fully stocked first-aid kit at any drugstore or pharmacy.

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4 PUT UP SIGNS, ROPE IT OFF, AND MARK THE DANGER SPOTS

Another simple thing you can do is put up signs in big, bold print on bright-colored paper on and around everything on set that is of potential danger: "WARNING—Do not plug lights in this outlet!!!" "WATCH YOUR STEP," "PLEASE STAY OFF BALCONY," "DO NOT COVER GENERATOR WITH ANYTHING!!!" etc. (A safety sign cannot be big and obnoxious enough in my opinion.) Similarly, from any big-box hardware store you can purchase some iconic yellow caution tape that has the word "caution" printed on every inch to rope off areas of the set that you want to keep people away from. If a potentially dangerous area does need to be accessed, limit access to only those crew members who need to deal with it directly, such as the grips or gaffers. And although they went out fashion in the '80s, neon colors are always in fashion when it comes to safety. Use bright, obnoxious neon pink, yellow, and green tape to clearly note areas of caution and catch people's eyes.



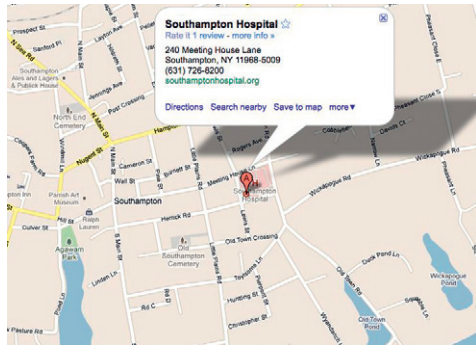
Bright neon colors are always fashionable when it comes to safety. People can't help but see this light stand on the floor now.

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5 KNOW WHERE THE NEAREST HOSPITAL IS

The producer or A.D. on set is normally responsible for this standard precaution. Knowing how to get to the nearest hospital emergency room is as simple as doing a Google Map search. Equally important is knowing the fastest route to get there. For a serious emergency, you may have to decide which is faster: driving versus calling an ambulance. Having the hospital's address already punched into your production vehicle's GPS unit will save you those extra excruciating minutes of trying to punch in the address and make navigation decisions while someone in your passenger seat needs urgent medical care.



6 GOT PHONE SERVICE?

While we're speaking of hospitals and ambulances, you should be very wary and extra cautious of shooting at any remote location with no phone service at all. The ability to be able to call 9-1-1 and get emergency medical help on set within minutes is not one that you want to be without. In the very worst-case accident scenarios, the inability to make a quick phone call can become a life-or-death situation. You need to have a full medical emergency plan and know all the nearest emergency healthcare providers and their hours of operation when you are shooting in remote and isolated places. It would also be wise to let those emergency care providers (i.e., paramedics, fire dept., etc.) know exactly where you will be shooting beforehand, so they can quickly get to your remote location if there is an unexpected emergency...and all film set emergencies are always "unexpected," but they should never be *unprepared* for.

7 SECURE EVERYTHING

Wherever possible, all heavy equipment should be safely secured in place so that it does not fall over or onto someone. Securing things is not only a safety issue, but also an equipment issue. Equipment that's not held in place is more prone to getting dropped, broken, or knocked over accidentally. By secure *everything*, I mean

- Put sandbags on lights and C-stands.
- Always double-check the security of your tripod and tripod plate.
- Make sure any overhead lights are securely fastened down and have safety chains or wires as well.
- If your tripod has spreader legs at the bottom, sand bag those, too.
- If someone needs to climb a ladder, the ladder should be secured in place by another crew member.

In other words, secure *everythang*.



s0040
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f0025
p0125

s0045
p0100

107
s0050

p0135

p0140
p0145
p0150

p0155

p0160
f0030
p0165
p0170

LIGHTING: GETTING YA SHINE ON | 107

s0055

p0175

8 HAVE A SAFETY BRIEFING

Whenever you shoot whatever you shoot, you should take a few minutes to make sure that the entire crew—from the bottom to the top—has been briefed on basic safety concerns for the day. This doesn't have to be a special safety meeting per se. You can just set aside a few minutes during your normal preshoot briefing with the talent and crew. (You do normally have a preshoot briefing with your talent and crew, *right?*) The A.D., producer, or director needs to brief everyone on safety concerns with any specific props, scenes, or vehicles; how to navigate (or avoid) any dangerous areas on location; and any dangerous equipment, lights, or rigging on set.



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9 MAKE SURE EVERYBODY KNOWS WHAT'S UP

If you are doing a stunt or dealing with any unusual scenario, prop, or vehicle, such as using a helicopter; staging a Samurai sword fight or a gun battle; shooting on a boat; or rigging a camera car or anything else out of the norm with potential safety implications, make sure that everyone on set—from the production assistants to the talent to the craft services people—knows exactly what the scene is going to entail, who will be involved, when it will happen, and how everyone else can stay out of harm's way.

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10 AVOID THE UNTRAINED, INEXPERIENCED, AND INCOMPETENT

When it comes to dangerous equipment and activities on set, there should always be an experienced professional who routinely deals with any of those types of props, equipment, vehicles, or stunts on set whenever these riskier scenes are scheduled. People who are untrained, inexperienced, and incompetent with specialty props, equipment, vehicles, or physical stunts are a big potential liability for injury and even lawsuits when all the dust clears.

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If you feel like you have no choice but to have someone with little to no experience handle something on set that is potentially dangerous, I strongly recommend that you both do as much homework as possible on the subject matter and try to get some sort of training session with a professional beforehand. If you can't arrange for some one-on-one guidance by a professional, at least make sure you've taken the time to consult someone with previous experience in the issues at hand. Even a 20-minute phone consultation with someone who's already been there and done that successfully could save you immeasurable amounts of unforeseen and unfamiliar trouble on set and help protect your crew from potential danger. Also, be honest and straightforward with everyone on set about any possible risks that you think they could incur. Everybody needs to be 100 percent comfortable and okay with anything they are asked to do on set. (And if they aren't, it's a clear indication that what you are asking for should probably not be done and be completely rethought, replanned, or reconceived instead.)

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