BSIS Test Cutting Safety Guidelines

**Brisbane school of Iberian Swordsmanship (BSIS) – Test Cutting Safety Guidelines**

Disclaimer: This is modelled on the School of Defense Arts (SHDA) document, thus accounting for the strong resemblance.

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**1.0 Purpose of Safety guidelines**

This document is made to define safety guidelines for the safe practise of sharp weapons in the activity of test cutting. Safety guidelines should be made with the intent of minimising risk and injuries in an activity. This is believed to be necessary due to the risk a sharp weapon presents to participants and observers.

**1.1 Purpose of test-cutting**BSIS is an historical school of swordsmanship and considers itself a school under the umbrella term Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA). It is believed that test-cutting provides feedback on the use of a sword or similar weapon and informs participants on the historical use of such weapons. Test-cutting helps participants practice the fundamental aspects of cutting such as edge alignment and understand the mechanics of cutting and thrusting with sharp weapons.

**2.0 The weapons used**

Weapons used are likely to be sharp rapiers and side-swords; words being used are the common use of such labels, rather than historical or formal use of the words (rapiers/sideswords). These weapons are named for the purpose of defining and recording the intended tool for the test-cutting exercise. These weapons should be clean for hygiene reasons before use. Weapons should preferably be of good make and balance so as to not risk injury to less coordinated participants.

**3.0 Instruction**

Test-cutting should be managed by an experienced instructor at all times. Multiple instructors at BSIS have been to multiple test-cutting sessions with other groups and events. They should be relied upon to supervise the participants of the test-cutting. Instructors should be present mostly for safety, but also to provide feedback and instruction to participants.

**3.1 Supervision**

Participants should be supervised by an instructor at all times. Extreme attention should be used when observing inexperienced or first-time test-cutters. Hazards should be identified, and participants should have a wide space around them and their target.

**3.2 Emergencies**

Emergencies should not happen but if they do a first-aid kit should be available onsite. Nearby hospitals should have been identified prior to the event, and so there should be a plan to drive injured parties to a hospital in case of serious injuries. For public demonstrations which are outside of the intended scope of this document it would be worth considering having a dedicated first-aid team such as seen at tournaments.

**4.0 Planning**

Test-cutting events should be planned in advance with multiple steps undertaken before the event to ensure it runs safely and smoothly.

**4.1 Announcing the event**Events should be announced ahead of time allowing for adequate time to prepare and find locations, as well adjust locations to be suitable for test-cutting. Announcing should be to the BSIS members first, or even exclusively. If non-BSIS members are to participate it should be through invitation, and they should be insured with Australian Living History Federation Inc (ALHF) or a comparable or equivalent insurer.

**4.2 Location**

For safety concerns a location should be chosen that has adequate space for the activity. If a location has inadequate space it will be harder to keep people out of the threatened zone around test-cutters and their target. A secondary concern would be a location that is near a hospital should a serious injury result.

**5.0 Setting up the location**

Action should be taken to verify the location is suitable, and actions should be taken to prepare it for the activity.

**5.1 Clearing the space**

Objects and hazards should be clear from the space. As before the space should be large enough to allow this. A guideline for deciding a suitable space would be one where you could draw a circle with a 3 metre radius around both the participant and target.

**5.2 Lighting**

Ideally this activity should happen during the day so that there is sufficient natural light. If indoors, there should be sufficient artificial light. This is also true if the event is held during the nighttime hours. All potential hazards should be observable under the light conditions.

**5.3 Spectators**

As mentioned before, the participant and target should have a 3 metre radius around them, and observers should be outside of this. That should be treated as a minimum distance. A recommended distance should be 3 metres or more. While not necessary, roping off or marking a space would be ideal to keep spectators from entering the threatened space.

**5.4 Public**

Public should be roped off, or some comparable means to keep them from entering the space as public is not trained or informed on safety in regards to test-cutting. This document is not made with public demonstration in mind, this is merely an added contingency.

**5.5 Storage**

Swords should be stored in one place, or at least have a clearly identifiable purpose in where they are stored. This should be out of the way from traffic.

**6.0 Setting up the target**

This document recognises there is not a uniform kind of target for test-cutting and so attempts to identify common targets and provide guidelines on them.

**6.1 Stand**

A stand is the standard device used in test-cutting and what this document expects at the test-cutting event. A stand is usually wooden, and is used to elevate a target such as a water or milk container. Stands should be stable and should require effort to fall over. They should not inadvertently fall over from the motion of the object placed atop being struck. This should be tested before the event.

**6.2 Height of stand**

A stand should be at a height suited to most participants, not too short for tall people, not too high for short people. This ideal will have to be approximated.

**6.3 Rope**

A rope (or other method of suspension) represents an alternative device to set up a target. Instead of standing from the ground, a rope would suspend the object from above, this can be a fence, wire ceiling or in most cases, a tree.

**6.4 Height of rope**

As in the case of the stand this should be set at a reasonable height, which as before is approximated. Unlike a stand, the length of the rope or other suspension can be adjusted more easily on the day.

**6.5 Other set ups**

Other set-ups are not in the scope of this document, if they are to be introduced to the event this document should be updated to account for them.

**7.0 Targets**

There can be a range of targets. What will be listed here is the common or expected targets used within the community. Targets not listed here should not be considered for test-cutting unless they have been tested and evaluated prior to the event, and have been added to this document.

**7.1 Milk containers**

These containers are a soft plastic and are the most common targets. They are very easy to cut, and so are ideal for beginners. The bottles are filled with water so that they can be cut without leaving the stand.

**7.2 Other liquid containers**

Plastic containers, like the previous but these containers can be a harder plastic, especially in the case of soft-drink or juice bottles. Participants should be a little more experienced but the risk is still considered minimal.

**7.3 Tatami mats**

These are rarely used within the community due to cost but would be ideal for experienced test-cutters, which is why they are used in Eastern Marital Arts circles, and in international HEMA events. As mentioned, they should preferably be cut by more experienced students since they offer more resistance than plastic containers.

**7.4 Bamboo**

There is a lack of experience in cutting bamboo so should not be used at an event without members having practised cutting bamboo prior to said event.

**7.5 Clay**

Clay has been used within HEMA before and is a good target for test-cutting as it is reusable, provides resistance and shows the angle of the cut very well. It is however more harmful to the sword over time and so people volunteering their weapons should be aware to this, and consent to this prior to use.

**7.6 Pool noodle**

Pool noodles are good cheap substitute for tatami or bamboo and provide more challenge than plastic containers. They are more difficult to cut so inexperienced participants should not be cutting pool noodles. To make cutting of pool noodles easier, only well-made weapons should be used as a sharp edge and good balance will reduce the risk of complications. This would have to be evaluated by an experienced instructor as there is no professional guidelines to evaluating the sharpness and quality of weapons. As well, pool noodles are best supported by something in the hollow middle of the pool noodle, so it can stand more firmly, though this needs to be soft enough to not present unnecessary difficulty to the cutter. A very secure stand also goes a long way in making the pool noodle a good target for test-cutting.

**8.0 Briefing**

Prior to test cutting beginning, participants should be present for an introductory brief on the event, safety, and documents. If they miss this briefing, they should be updated by an instructor or other participant before joining in on the activity.

**8.1 Awareness of document**

They should be made aware of the topics of the briefing. They should have been provided with this document prior with the expectation that they have read through it. This document can be provided electronically or printed.

**8.2 Contents of briefing**

The document should be summarised for them, including relevant parts. The weapons, stands and target should be explained to them, but only the ones in-use on the day. It should also involve the general safety rules to be listed below. There should be a nominated supervisor, or supervisors, so that at least one is present and actively supervising at all times. It may be prudent to nominate a target assistant to perform functions to make the target set up quicker. If others are helping in an ad hoc fashion this presents risks and dangers and should be avoided.

**8.3 General safety rules**

a) They should understand the expected space between the participant, the target, and everyone else.

b) They should understand the dangers of a sharp weapon. They should take care that they do not cut themselves or others, and their behaviour should be consistently respectful of this principle.

c) People should be trusted to handle a sharp weapon, as to be determined by instructors. The use of a sharp weapon can be retracted by said instructors in the case they believe it is being used unsafely.

d) If “Hold” is called, by anyone, all participants and observers should cease what they are doing and attempt to identify dangers or hazards, and then act accordingly.

**9. Participants**

Participants are to be evaluated and approved by the instructor team. If participants are considered inexperienced, the instructors should provide them extra attention in consideration of this, or in worst case scenario decline to allow them to participate in the test-cutting activities.

**10. Sword safety and handling**

a) Swords used for test-cutting are sharp and must be treated with respect.

b) Carelessness is not to be tolerated as it can easily result in injury.

c) Actions taken with the sword should be planned and measured.

d) before using a sword participants and supervisors should evaluate the area for hazards.

e) swords should not be placed on moist or unclean surfaces, and they should not be handled by the bare-hands unless the holder owns that particular weapon. This is both to keep the swords clean, but also to reduce the maintenance required. This consideration does not factor in stainless steel weapons which with few exceptions are usually not ideal for this exercise due to quality issues.

f) After use, swords should be cleaned by a cloth, and wiped with an oiled cloth afterwards. If there is going to be frequent use an oiled cloth can be reserved until the end of the event.

**11. Inexperienced participants**

If a participant is inexperienced, but still considered safe by the instructors, they should be given a demonstration of cleaning, holding and using the weapon. Special care should be taken to make sure they understand the document. They should receive extra supervision when undertaking any activities.

**12. Collecting weapons**

Weapons should be approached, picked up and carried evenly, and a sensible speed. Swords should be carried tip down, and should attempt to pass by others with as much space as possible.

**13.1** **Cutting**

a) If inexperienced, should simulate the cut or thrust from out of distance.

b) should have a balanced posture

c) should refrain from wild swinging as identified by instructors

d) instructors should evaluate whether they need to offer constant feedback, or offer feedback afterwards. This evaluation depends principally on safety. An inexperienced participant may need to be guided and walked through the exercise.

e) If an instructor is to approach the cutter, a hold should be called first, or some sort of system should be worked out between the instructor and participant.

**13.2 resetting target**

The target should be reset by the test-cutter, or someone is to be designated for this role (a target assistant). This is so people are aware of when the cutting has ceased, and when the target is being set up. If this is handled chaotically it can lead to easily preventable risks.

**13. Target assistant**

If a target assistant is nominated, cutting should not occur when they are within 3 metres of the target. Weapons should be held point down while the assistant is within distance or motion. Hold and clear should be used as the target assistant’s discretion to provide an auditory prompt for the participants. A target assistant may need to clear the area, like with any identified safety hazard they should call hold first.

**Risk Assessment**

Risk Assessment copied from School of Historical Defense Arts (SHDA) guidelines.

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| **Hazard** | **Risk** **Management** |
| General Safety | Safety Guidelines provided to all participants  Safety Briefing provided to all participants  Demonstration provided to new participants  No participants to be affected by drugs or alcohol |
| Lighting | Ensure sufficient lighting to easily identify any and all hazards |
| Trips | Ensure ground is even and clear and free of any trip hazards  Ensure ground is clear of cutting debris after each action |
| Proximity | Ensure at least 3 metres clearance around all cutting stands  Ensure all at least 3 metres distance between cutting stands and spectators  Ensure all spectators are behind action  Ensure any photographers are not closer than 3 metres – to the side is acceptable  Ensure designated area marked by lines or ropes  No cutting to occur while any person is closer than 3 metres |
| Swords | All swords are to be in good condition including blades and handles.  Swords are to be specifically designed for the purpose of cutting and pose no risk of breaking  Swords to be checked by experienced person (Instructor) |
| Injury - Small | First Aid Kit on site and accessible |
| Injury - Large | Vehicle (and driver) available for transport to hospital if required  Working mobile phone available for 000 call  Ambulance accessibility considered |