

Safety measures for cutting exercises

Author : safety panel of the FFAMHE.

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Purpose

Cutting and thrusting exercises using authentic weapons or replicas on non-living targets is an essential part of HEMA. The goal of these exercises is to apprehend the dynamics of a sharp weapon, and to perfect one's technique.

These exercises require the use of sharp weapons, and induce a number of risks, both for the person practicing and for the people in his immediate environment.

The aim of this document is to propose a number of safety measures to reduce the risk of injury during such exercises.

Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of every HEMA practitioner to use proper equipment, weapons and clothing.

These measures are destined to reinforce the safety of practitioners, but cannot guarantee it. The FFAMHE declines any responsibility in case of injury.

References

This document is one of three documents on safety recommendations presented by the safety panel. The two others are :

- Safety during the practice of HEMA
- First aid kit for the practice of HEMA

Description of a cutting exercise

Cuts and thrusts are practiced on static non-living targets placed on a stable rest. Typical targets consist of water filled plastic bottles or humidified clay around a cardboard tube. There are various other types of targets, depending on the goal of the exercise.

Typical weapons consist of swords and sabres of all sorts. These exercises can also be conducted using shorter (knives, daggers) or longer weapons (poleaxes, halberds, etc.)

Amongst the people present at a cutting exercise, practitioners (either cutting or assisting in the exercise) should be separated from bystanders. In the rest of the document, the person cutting will be identified as the executant. Those waiting their turn or preparing targets or equipment will be called observers.

The session starts as the weapons leave their cases. The session ends as the weapons return to their cases. The safety measures should apply during the whole session.

Unwanted events

Two main types of accidents are to be avoided during these exercises:

- The executant injures himself;
- The executant injures another person, an instructor, practitioner or bystander.

The executant can injure himself for various reasons:

- The executant lacks experience, the lack of calm reducing control over his movements;
- The executant fumbles;
- The executant is hit or pushed during the exercise, or slips due to the terrain;
- The target does not react as expected (it breaks, is projected, or falls from the stand).

The executant can also injure another person for various reasons:

- The weapon slips from his hands or breaks and hits another person;
- A person is in the weapons' path;
- The target or a fragment of it is projected by the impact onto another person.

Because of the nature of the weapons employed, injuries must be expected to fall into the category of cuts and open wounds of varying severity.

Safety measures

Measures concerning weapons and apparel

It is recommended that the executant does not wear any jewellery (rings, earrings, necklaces, brooches, etc.) during the exercise.

Long hair must be attached.

The executant must wear leather or anti-skid gloves. The handles on the weapons can be very different, and may become slippery due to sweat, heat or stress. Using gloves will help in maintaining a good grip.

It is preferable that the executant and people in close proximity wear eyeglasses to protect their eyes from projections.

Measures concerning the practice area

Cutting exercises should be carried out in low traffic places with sufficient space; the terrain should be flat and not be slippery. There must be sufficient space for:

- Various necessary items (unused weapons, cleaning kits, spare targets, etc.);
- Setting up the target;
- Moving around the target and cutting it;
- A safe corridor far enough from the area where the cutting takes place.

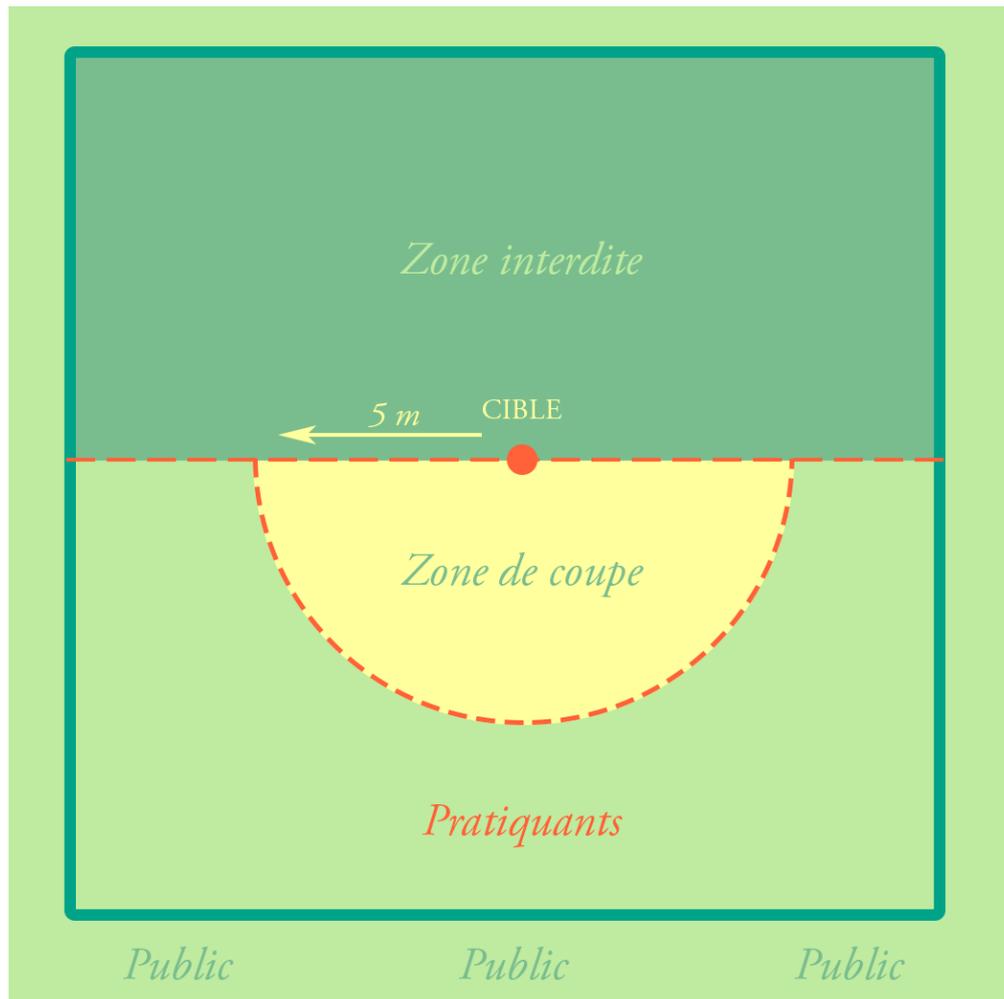
Organizers should expect that observers and bystanders gather to watch the cutting exercises.

- Movement around the cutting area should be limited, and be totally absent when the executant is about to make his cut.
- Observers and bystanders must be standing behind the executant, to avoid getting hit by any flying target or weapon.
- No one is to stand in front of or on the side of the executant when cutting or thrusting is about to take place.

Unused weapons must be deposited in a specified place. This document will refer to it as the preparation zone. Ideally, there should be a stable table, if no table is available, a cover on the ground will do. Weapons will be left there when unused, for inspection and cleaning.

We can therefore identify four areas in a cutting exercise:

- The no man's land (zone interdite);
- The exercise zone (zone d'exercice / zone de coupe), where practitioners stay;
- The preparation zone (not shown on the figure);
- The public zone (zone publique).



Nobody should be in the **no man's land** (zone interdite) during the session. Only the executant should be in the **exercise zone** (zone d'exercice) when a cut is about to be carried out. The **preparation zone** (zone de préparation) is forbidden to anyone not practicing or preparing weapons or targets. Finally the **public zone** (zone publique) is the only place where bystanders should be. Borders should ideally be indicated with barriers, lines, or by any other means.

Weapons should be sheathed, or carried with the point aiming down in the **preparation zone**. This is to be applied anywhere between the cutting zone and the public zone.

Weapons should be in their cases every time they cross into the **public zone**.

The executant may hold his weapon as he wishes in the **exercise zone**. He must hold it point down whenever he leaves this zone. He must be alone in that zone, therefore, it is up to him to position and adjust the target on its stand if necessary.

Nobody is to go into the **no man's land** during the session.

It is highly recommended not to run in the preparation and exercise zones.

Measures concerning the cutting sessions

During a cutting exercise, the following steps take place: preparation of the target, weapons check and preparation, the cut or thrust in itself, retrieval and inspection of the target, cleaning and inspection of the weapon used.

It is essential that the targets be stable and correctly positioned, and that they are not susceptible of damaging the weapon even if the cut is successful.

It is essential to inspect the weapons after each cut.

If the weapon gets stuck in the target or the stand, the executant alone must dislodge it: the exercise zone is forbidden to any other person. Special care must be taken when pulling out the weapon. The weapon must not be pulled out hastily or with extensive force. The executant must place himself on the left side of the weapon (if right handed). The edge must not be oriented towards his face, his left hand should hold the stand or target, and he must carefully pull out the weapon with his right hand by pulling along its' axis.

Measures concerning persons and behaviour

A cutting session should never be carried out by one person alone, as in the case of injury, another person must be present to call for help and provide first aid. It is therefore recommended that there be at least two persons, while the first person cuts, the other supervises, watches out for potential hazards, inspects equipment and helps prepare targets. This partner will officiate, giving the green light for the blow, and will (vocally) interrupt the exercise in case of danger.

When a beginner practices cutting, he should be supervised by a more experienced practitioner, who will give him advices and reassure him. These advices will be given from the preparation zone.

The executant must remain calm and in control. He should not:

- Wave about with a weapon in his hand;
- Reach for a falling target with a weapon in his hand;
- Remain calm even in the absence of success;

Moving inside the exercise, preparation zones and the no man's land must be done with the weapon's point aiming down.

Concerning behaviour, ego should be left aside during cutting sessions:

- It is strongly recommended not to organize challenges or contests during cutting sessions. The only goal of these exercises must be to understand the dynamics of the items used in HEMA.
- The executant must take his time, and not try to show off. Bystanders and observers must avoid "encouraging" the executant to go faster or to show off in any way.
- It is recommended that the executant does not cut in haste. He must take care not to cut himself as he starts his cut and as he finishes it. He should not hold his weapon too close to him at the beginning of the cut, and advance the foot on the side from where he cuts, as he cuts. For example, if he starts by holding a sword at his right shoulder, left foot forward, he should end his cut with his right foot forward. This simple precaution should avoid the executant from inadvertently hitting his left leg with the weapon. More generally, the plane in which the weapon travels should be void of any obstacle. When using single handed weapons, it is advised that the off-hand should be kept out of harm's way, behind the executant's back.