

WHAT TO EXPECT





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For people who are unfamiliar with screen production it can take many forms. If you have been contacted by an individual or a company who wish to film at your property, or within your local area, it is important to understand the wide range of possibilities this may present. By understanding what is involved and being able to anticipate the activity it will ensure a more productive and enjoyable experience.

HOW MANY PEOPLE?

The term “film crew” could mean three people, or three hundred, it depends on the production. Documentaries usually have the least amount of people involved, and feature films often have the most. But, there are no rules for this, every job is different. Conversely, some documentaries have more people because they re-create portions of history and require actors in period costume with elaborate wigs. Also, some feature film productions choose to work without complex lighting setups and prefer an intimate, natural style with very few people which can enable filming in public places without being noticed.

It is good to know what type of production is proposed, but it is also important to know how many people will be on-location in order to anticipate the potential impact on the neighbourhood.

In Western Australia, a television commercial production will typically have between 10 to 40 people on location and a feature film will usually involve between 30 to 70 people.

WHAT DOES EVERYONE DO?

Some small shoots have people who are multi-skilled. For example, on a very small production there could be just one actor who does their own makeup and hair. As the size of a production grows, the jobs become more specialised and the volume of work increases. A large and complex screen production may have many actors, several makeup artists and separate hairdressers.

As with any workplace, when the number of people required to do a primary task increases, there is also an increase in the number of secondary people who are needed to manage and support those people.

There are the commonly known roles such as Director and Camera Operator but there can also be many specialised

responsibilities related to things such as lighting, special effects, props and safety. Reading the end-credits of any feature film is a reminder, it can take a lot of people to make a screen production.

It is normal to have the number of people on-location vary throughout a working day. For example: some actors may not be required to perform in all scenes and some specialised technical or support crew are only needed for specific tasks. An efficient screen production will manage the work-flow and minimise the number of people.

THE MOBILE WORKPLACE

In practical terms, it is important to remember that people working on-location for a screen production are “at work” and the production company (the employer) has a responsibility to provide basic facilities to ensure a safe and healthy workplace. These include provision of water, toilets, shelter, power, an area for meals, first aid supplies and enough space to perform the duties required.

From time to time, producers will ask public agencies to allow access to facilities like public toilets and shelters. This may be negotiated on a fee-for-hire basis. Alternatively, contact details of privately owned facilities may be requested from the Film Liaison Officer or they may be asked to contact the owner on behalf of the production.

For small productions these facilities can usually be found within the filming location or immediate environs. For larger productions, the shooting crew will often separate their workplaces into two areas. The first being where the filming takes place, the second is an area often called the “unit base”. Unit base working areas are usually assembled in open places with flat ground. Local parks, fields or unused car parking areas are often used. The Location Manager will negotiate for the use of these areas separately from the filming location.

The unit base will ideally be walking distance from the filming area and have enough space to accommodate facilities for meals, costume and makeup. Usually these facilities are setup inside purpose-built trucks and marquees. Film production companies usually provide their own catering to ensure that cast and crew can eat at regular intervals, minimising time away from the set.

Motor vehicle parking also needs to be considered. Trucks with equipment integral to the filming process (i.e. camera, grip, lighting, generator, sound and props) are

known as, essential vehicles, and they require parking as close to filming as possible, in order for equipment to be accessed regularly throughout the day. For larger productions, there will usually be several equipment trucks parked near the filming location and several more at the unit base. Car parking is also required, normally close to the unit base. The long hours and variable nature of the work usually make it difficult or impossible to use public transport. The size of the filming crew is often represented in vehicle numbers more than any other aspect. The ratio is usually almost one-to-one: one vehicle for each person.

Film crews often need to arrive at a location and set up very early so that they can begin filming as soon as there is enough natural light. A standard work day requires between 8 to 10 hours of filming in addition to a 45-minute lunch break, plus whatever time is needed for makeup, hair and costume at both ends of the day. This means that some crew members can be working a minimum of 12 hours every day.

The first to arrive and the last to leave the unit base or set are usually the caterers, unit, hair, makeup and costume crew as well as associated trucks, marquees and portable toilets. Much of the early activity requires the use of generators for power.

When filming is over for the day, all equipment from the filming location is returned to the essential vehicles. All signs of activity should be removed from the location unless the crew will return the following day, in which case trucks and equipment often remains on site with security personnel in place.

