

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees
19-02 Steinway Street Astoria, NY 11105
Phone: (718) 906-9440
Fax: (718) 777-1820



IATSE LOCAL 52

JOB DESCRIPTION – Prop Department

Job Title:	Special Effects
-------------------	-----------------

Job Description:

Special effects technicians are responsible for creating the effects on screen in a movie, theater, television or multimedia production. Though when the words "special effects" first come to mind, what most people think of are monsters, aliens and robots, special effects technicians are also responsible for more mundane effects such as rain or fog. A special effects (SFX) technician produces visual, pyrotechnic (explosive) or physical effects in order to create a particular impression or illusion in a film, television, stage or video production.

Duties & Responsibilities:

The main task of a special effects technician is to work with the director to come up with effects for a particular shot. A senior effects technician typically sits down with the director of the film as the film budget is drawn up to give the director an idea of how much the effects in the film are going to cost. This can include explosions, special character rigging, blood and other bodily fluids, and atmospheric effects, such as heavy fog or rain. Once the budget is set, the special effects technician retreats to a workshop to design any creatures, vehicles or effects needed.

When the camera starts rolling, the special effects technician's job is to ensure that his/her effects work properly. This may include manipulating arms for specialized puppets, pumping blood, operating servos for remotely moving objects, or manning a rain machine. In some cases, after an effect has been performed, the effects technician needs to quickly reset the effect so it's ready for another take.

Skills & Education

A special effects person has to ensure the safety of his/her crew and everyone else on set. Before the cameras start rolling, local officials may step onto set and perform inspections, so knowledge of the law and safety protocols helps when using explosives and firearms during the production process. Specific education programs are recommended for one to gain high awareness in health and safety. Other training in various fields such as handling explosives, firearms, high voltage and other hazardous material and equipment is helpful. Strong communication skills and presentation skills are an asset because being able to show such skills during the interview process proves personal responsibility and willing to collaborate with others. As well, the head of the entire special effects team works closely with the production designer and art director. The supervisor plans a special effects scene and presents it to the director, in hope that he/she will be pleased with the results. Experience in photography may be an advantage in this job because as the supervisor, he/she has to plan the camera angles when shooting special effects scenes. Starting young allows one to absorb all the information and experience you can get and applying them to become a special effects artist.

Special effects artists rely on talent and experience, as well as education, to help them refine their skills. Those who wish to have a career in special effects typically find it helpful to take plenty of art courses where a variety of materials and creativity can be explored.