
DO I NEED A FILM LOCATION RELEASEE

Why you need a location release?

Whenever a film is being shot outside a studio, the producer may need to obtain one or more location releases from the owners of the property where filming takes place. Whilst the Copyright Act allows you to film buildings without infringing copyright, other laws affect filming on public and private property. Failing to obtain a location release could expose the producer to liability such as for breach of council regulations or trespass.

Location releases are also important as many film festivals, funding bodies and distributors will insist that they are provided as part of the chain of title. They don't want to risk having to withdraw a film because of legal issues surrounding a failure to get permission to film in a particular place. Chain of title is a series of documents that establish the producer's right to put all the different components of the film together.

Whose approval do I need to film on private property

It is important to do your research and find out both the owner of the land or building you want to film on and also the current occupier. You may need permission from both. For example, if you are filming in a friend's rented house you should get permission from your friend who is renting the house (occupier) and his or her landlord (owner).

What if I can only contact the occupier?

You must have the permission of the occupier of the property to avoid liability for trespass. However, the terms of the occupier's agreement with the owner (landlord) might also affect whether you can film there so it is prudent also to ensure that the owner of the land has also given permission.

For example, your friend may permit you to film a party scene in the backyard of his rented house. But such filming may be in breach of his rental agreement and the landlord could be entitled to stop filming from proceeding. If you have the permission of both the occupier and the owner, this problem is avoided. Remember that there may be still be other issues from the local council and neighbours if there is excess noise or the filming creates a nuisance (water flooding neighbouring gardens).

Will I be trespassing if I don't get permission?

If you do not have permission from the occupier, there is a risk you could be trespassing. You will be liable for trespass whenever you enter private land without the permission of the occupier: whether or not your activities cause any damage.

Filming or photographing private property from outside that property such as from an adjacent property or from the air may still be problematic in some circumstances. For example, filming from the air can amount to trespass where the intrusion into the property's airspace interferes with the occupier's use of the land; such as through prolonged hovering in a helicopter. If the filming involves recording private conversations (as compared than scripted conversations of actors) this will be an offence in most States and Territories.

Do I need permission if I want to film in a public area?

Many public authorities have a responsibility to ensure that private activities carried on in public areas have a minimum impact on the general public's access and enjoyment of those spaces. For example, local councils are accountable to their ratepayers and residents for the responsible use of council resources, land and community amenities. Many public authorities operate an approval system which applies to any filming activities on their property and it may be an offence to film without first obtaining such an approval. A fee may need to be paid.

Therefore, if you are shooting in a park, on public land, or in a street you should get permission from the local council. A fee usually applies and it is important to allow sufficient time for the application process.

Some activities which may require approval from the relevant public authority include:

- anything which will involve restricting the access of the general public to a public area (e.g. cordoning off part of a street or beach);
- the erection of structures (e.g. set construction);
- large numbers of people congregating in one place or parking and creating local traffic congestion (e.g. cast and crew, or trucks for catering);
- activities creating noise and pollution risks; and
- use of special equipment (e.g. cables on footpaths) and dangerous substances.

It is the producer's responsibility to find out if approval is needed and to obtain that approval. Whether approval can be obtained may depend on the nature of the film proposal and the status of the land. For example, a proposal involving a car accident and explosions may not be able to be filmed on a suburban street but may receive approval in a disused council warehouse space.

In some circumstances, a producer may be required to notify local residents or community that filming will take place, or agree that at the end of filming they will repair all damage, remove all rubbish and restore the location to its original condition prior to filming and to the satisfaction of the council.

Insurance

A common requirement in order to obtain a location release for a public area or building is sufficient public liability insurance. For further information on insurance, see *The Arts Law Insurance Handbook* ([link to page where publications are sold](#)), available from Arts Law.

Special rules for certain locations or activities

Certain locations have special approval processes. For example, to film in:

- national parks – contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service;
- armed forces bases or buildings – contact the Department of Defence and/or the relevant armed force service;
- airports and other ports – contact the relevant State or Territory authority;
- the Sydney Opera House – contact the Sydney Opera House Trust;
- Centennial and Moore Parks, Sydney NSW – contact the Centennial and Moore Park Trust;
- the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain, Sydney NSW – contact the Royal Botanical Gardens and Domain Trust; or
- Sydney Harbour Foreshore – contact the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.

There are also specific approval processes for certain types of activities such as:

- regulation or diversion of traffic – contact the State or Territory road and traffic authority;
- filming in or on the water, or filming that will have an effect on the local environment or cause pollution (including lighting a fire, smoke, loud noise, explosions, vibrations or the appearance of some form of water or air pollution) – contact the State or Territory waterways, environmental authority or land and water conservation authority;
- discharging firearms – contact the local police; and
- filming on buses, ferries or trains – contact the relevant State or Territory transit or rail authority.

In each State, Territory and local council area, there will be a different application process. Some States and Territories also have a department of local government protocol for filming. For example, the NSW Department of Local Government has developed the *Local Government Filming Protocol* to guide Councils and filmmakers. The protocol sets out a standard application and approvals process which was developed jointly by the film industry and local and State government in NSW. A copy of this protocol can be obtained from the NSW Department of Local Government or downloaded from the NSW Office of Fair Trading website (www.fto.nsw.gov.au).

There are some activities that may not need approval

For example, in NSW under the *Local Government Act 1933* no local council location release is required for:

- still photography;
- video recording of a wedding ceremony or other private celebration or event principally for the purpose of making a record for the participants in the ceremony, celebration or event; or
- filming for the immediate purposes of a current affairs or daily news television program.

Getting assistance

Does this all sound complicated? You can contact your State or Territory film body.

National

Screen Australia (formerly Australian Film Commission) (www.screenaustralia.gov.au/)

Tel: 1800 213 099 Email: info@screenaustralia.gov.au

Screen Producers Association of Australia (www.spaa.org.au)

Tel: (02) 9360 8988 Email: spaa@spaa.org.au

Australian Capital Territory

ScreenACT, (www.screenact.com.au) the ACT Office of Film, Television and Digital Media

Tel: (02) 6247 4199 info@screenact.com.au

New South Wales

Screen NSW (formerly NSW Film and Television Office) (www.screen.nsw.gov.au)

Tel: (02) 8222 4844 Email: info@screen.nsw.gov.au

Metro Screen (www.metroscreen.com.au)

Tel: (02) 9356 1818 Email: metro@metroscreen.org.au

There are also several regional organisations in NSW including Northern Rivers Screenworks (www.screenworks.com.au); Screenlinks (www.screenlinks.org) (mid-north coast); Film Central (www.filmcentralnsw.com); Film Hunter (www.screenhuntercentralcoast.com.au); Film Illawarra (www.filmillawarra.org); and Film Broken Hill (www.filmbrokenhill.com).

Northern Territory

Northern Territory Film Office (www.ntfilm.com.au)

Tel: (08) 8952 5222 Email: film.office@nt.gov.au

Film and Television Association of the NT (fatant.asn.au)

Tel: (08) 8941 5501 Email: admin@fatant.asn.au

Queensland

Screen Queensland (formerly Pacific Film & TV Commission) (www.screenqueensland.com.au)

Tel: (07) 3224 4114

QPIX (Queensland Filmmaker's Centre) (www.qpix.org.au)

Tel: (07) 3848 8000 Email: qpix@qpix.org.au

South Australia

South Australian Film Corporation (www.safilm.com.au)

Tel: (08) 8348 9300 Email: safilm@safilm.com.au

Media Resource Centre (MRC) (www.mrc.org.au)

Tel: (08) 8410 0979 Email: info@mrc.org.au

Tasmania

Screen Tasmania (www.screen.tas.gov.au)

Tel: (03) 6233 6995 Email: info@screen.tas.gov.au

WideangleTasmania (www.wideangle.org.au)

Tel: (03) 6223 8334 Email: info@wideangle.org.au

Victoria

Film Victoria (www.film.vic.gov.au)

Tel: (03) 9660 3200 Email: contact@film.vic.gov.au

ACMI Australian Centre for the Moving Image (www.acmi.net.au)

Tel: (03) 8663 2211

Open Channel (www.openchannel.org.au)

Tel: (03) 8610 9300 Email: info@openchannel.org.au

Western Australia

ScreenWest (www.screenwest.com.au)

Tel: (08) 9224 7340 Email: info@screenwest.wa.gov.au

Film Television Institute WA Inc (FTI) (www.fti.asn.au)

Tel: (08) 9431 6700 Email: fti@fti.asn.au

Need more help?

If you have questions about Location Releases or would like a Location Release document reviewed contact Arts Law.

Telephone: (02) 9356 2566 or toll-free outside Sydney 1800 221 457

Also visit the Arts Law website (www.artslaw.com.au) for articles and information sheets.

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