

The FX Dept.
SPECIAL EFFECTS DESIGN - PLANNING - SUPERVISION

Wednesday, May 17th, 2000

Legislative Council Secretariat
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regarding the Entertainment Special Effects Bill:

I am writing to you in response to the request for submissions on Entertainment Special Effects Bill. I have been a licensed, practicing special effects pyrotechnic operator for around twenty years and have experience with both the Hollywood and Hong Kong styles of filmmaking and the creation of safe yet spectacular special effects in either production environment.

I am member of the International Society of Explosives Engineers and a founding member of the Alliance of Special Effects and Pyrotechnic Operators and have served on numerous technical committees in the United States dealing with issues of special effects safety and regulation for many organizations including the California State Fire Marshal and the National Fire Protection Association.

For the last year and a half, I have been a consultant on special effects for the Hong Kong Government and have recently submitted my final report to the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority which included conducting a special effects training program to help the relevant authorities build up a pool of knowledge on the safe use of special effects for purposes of handling future permit applications, to provide safety training to the local operators and to make preliminary assessment and observations with regard to their level of competence and to advise the Government on the technical aspect of permit applications.

While I think that the Bill embodies some very good concepts, I think it is important to realize that the manner of its implementation will greatly affect the degree to which these ideas, however laudable, are brought to fruition.

The structure of the Bill places heavy reliance on the Commissioner for Television and Entertainment Licensing for implementation of the sound concepts put forth in the Bill. Thus it is very important that the Commissioner and his or her department be highly proficient in technical matters and in step with the unique needs of the motion picture/television industry and the production environment.

While I believe that our recently completed program was a success and achieved many positive results, unfortunately, in my opinion, there are a number of factors which lead me to believe that the rigid departmental organization of TELA may lack the technical expertise and flexibility necessary to react quickly, resulting in a system which is markedly different from the relatively flexible, user-friendly and film industry oriented American regulatory system it is intended to be patterned after.

In my opinion, in certain respects, there is a tendency toward adopting elements, materials or concepts which exist within the Hollywood system without sufficiently adapting them to the needs of the local film environment or providing sufficient support to make them practical.

As you know, there is currently a provisional registration system in place which is intended to address the interim needs of the motion picture/television special effects operators who have successfully completed our program by allowing them to apply for special effects permits from TELA. I have had a chance to observe the manner in which this system functions during my stay here and, in my opinion, compared to the American system, it involves a significantly higher paperwork burden, lengthier processing time and is generally not in step with the requirements and pace of motion picture/television production. Applicants were required to supply extensive documentation far beyond what would be required in Hollywood and in some cases, beyond what they could reasonably be expected to.

Further, in my opinion, there are numerous unresolved technical issues and a reluctance to actively pursue them, which in turn has led to a lack of succinct, timely answers to questions regarding the regulatory issues surrounding them which the motion picture/television industry both needs and deserves.

While many of these issues are indisputably complex and difficult, they in my experience require a persistent, long-term, holistic, and coordinated approach to problem solving.

I would also encourage you to continually gather further input directly from the local special effects operators, from the motion picture and television industry and from organizations which represent it such as the Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd., as well as the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force as this bill and the manner in which it is implemented will considerably affect, either positively or negatively, both the future of Hong Kong's world-renowned film industry and the safety of the public.

Though I will be leaving Hong Kong soon, please feel free to contact me at my hotel by fax if you would like to.

Sincerely,

Tassilo Baur