

WEIGHT FOR DISTANCE AND HAMMER THROWS - SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS March 2014

SHGA Rule 51 – Throwing the Weight For Distance: Standard Weights 28lbs. and 56lbs.

The weights shall be of metal with or without a chain/ring attached. The total weight being 28lbs or 56lbs. The weight shall measure 18ins overall. The weight shall be delivered with one hand, using any style, into a 34.92 degree sector; from inside a marked 9' winged box area, behind a 4' 6" wooden trig, which is within a suitable netted safety cage.

SHGA Rule 52 – Throwing the Hammer: Standard Weights 16lbs. and 22lbs.

The hammer head shall be of metal and spherical and the shaft shall be of wood or cane. The overall length of the hammer shall be 4ft. 2ins. The hammer shall be thrown standing style, into a 34.92 degree sector. It shall be delivered from behind a 4' 6" long wooden trig, which is within a suitable netted safety cage.

Under the terms of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, the SHGA and its Member Games have a duty to maintain the safety of spectators, officials and athletes, who attend their events.

Prior to the issue of an Entertainments Licence, Member Games have to submit Risk Assessment Forms to their local councils, detailing any perceived hazards and risks associated with their event. We have to look for existing and potential hazards, decide who might be harmed and how. Risks must be evaluated to decide whether existing precautions are adequate, or whether more should be done to prevent the inherent risks. Safety must be of paramount importance and mitigation measures will prevent litigation.

Due to recent accidents from implements thrown by 'Heavy' Athletes, when people have been hit by hammers and weights thrown for distance, the Health and Safety Executive are now taking a very close look at our sport. It is during those particular throwing events that serious injuries and fatalities can occur. Unfortunately, such incidents have occurred because the early warning signs, such as minor accidents and close calls, have largely been ignored.

To help reduce the likelihood of any incidents occurring at our Member Games, the SHGA has been reviewing the safety of our throwing events. Due primarily to ongoing safety concerns, particularly regarding the hammer throw competitions, it has been decided, to ensure the safety of spectators, officials and athletes, that suitable netted Safety Cages, or enclosures, become mandatory at Member Games.

Hammer Safety Cages were originally designed to prevent hammers from exiting the thrower's hands in unprotected directions, such as out of the back, out of the sides and in dangerous more vertical angles from the trig. However, research has shown that despite cages being available, accidents are still occurring in both practice and competition environments. As a result, it is felt that other safety measures will also have to be adopted.

As hammer throwing has developed and increased in popularity, as a measure to improve safety in amateur competitions, landing sectors have been marked on the field, for valid throws to land in. These sectors have shrunk from 90 degrees in the 1950's, to the 60 degrees of the 1960's, to 40 degrees in the 1970's and to the present sector angle of 34.92 degrees in 2002. Those reductions in sector size, coupled with an increase in the height of the Safety Cages, have dramatically reduced the number of accidents caused by hammers.

As a result of their proven usage in reducing accidents, a suitable netted Safety Cage and a similar marked throwing sector of 34.92 degrees, will now become mandatory, in all SHGA Member Games.

In deciding where to position the wooden trig and throwing sector, consideration must be given to the overall field layout, to establish where other events are, or will be, occurring and to where spectators will congregate and sit. A perceived Danger Area should be calculated, which takes into account the maximum distance that is capable of being thrown. Good communication between all the field users and spectators, to increase their awareness of the event, will help to control their movements and minimise their presence in the Danger Areas.

No other event that is within range should be occurring at the same time of any hammer throw or weight for distance competition. It is especially important that no events that involve children or spectator participation, should take place or even be announced, during those throwing competitions. Portions of the track, which are within the Danger Area, must not be used for any type of competition or warm-up purposes, during ongoing hammer and weight for distance events. It is recommended that no tent or platform should be situated within the Danger Area.

The landing area within the throwing sector should be examined, to make sure that it does not have any objects that may cause a bounce or unusual ricochets i.e. markers or other equipment. Very hard ground can cause a hammer to bounce. Large stones can also be a problem. Officials and others in the vicinity should be aware that wet grass may cause a hammer to skid.

The dimensions of temporary Safety Cages, especially their height and the size of their mouths/openings, are important factors in determining their safety effectiveness. The width of a cage mouth/opening, is directly related to the depth of the cage. It is recommended that SHGA temporary safety cages should be 'bulb' shaped. They should have a height of about 5.0m (16' 5"), a mouth/opening of 6.0m (19' 8"), a depth of 10.0m (32' 10") and have an overall length of 25.0m (82').

For the Hammer event, it is recommended that a wooden trig, 6ins. high and 4ft. 6ins. long, is positioned 6.0m (19' 8") from the mouth/opening at the front of the net, which is 4.0m (13' 1") from the rear of the net. The width of the net at the wooden trig position, should be about 7.0m (23').

For the Weight for Distance and the Shot Putt events, a 'Winged Box' throwing area, 6ft. 9ins. wide and 9ft. long, should be clearly marked behind a 'Winged' wooden trig. The 'Winged' wooden trig should be positioned 3.25m (10' 8") from the front of the net, which is 6.75m (22' 2") away from the rear of the net.

The netting used for the Safety Cage, should be constructed of synthetic polypropylene or other similar type material. It should be at least 2mm thick, with a mesh size no greater than 50mm.

Any sort of Heras, cyclone or chain link type fencing will no longer be acceptable materials for Safety Cage construction. It has been shown that a hammer can burst through them, while hammers and weights thrown for distance, can also rebound and ricochet from them.

The netting is primarily used to retard the momentum of the implement, not to stop it. To do this effectively, the netting should be loosely hung from poles positioned outside the net, so that it can absorb most of the energy from it. The netting should be sufficiently slack so that the implement will not bounce back towards the thrower, or ricochet away. Two layers of netting will be better than one. The base of the loosely gathered netting should be pegged to the ground. A properly installed net has "give" which helps protect the thrower in the cage, but this "give" may endanger spectators or officials standing too close to the netting. A safe zone must therefore be established around the external sides of the cage. Throwers and officials should always be instructed to stand at least five feet away from the outside of the cage. Even with a properly installed cage, onlookers may be in potential danger when they falsely assume they are safe, while standing too close to the cage netting.

A responsible official, who is fully aware of mitigating Risk Assessments, must ensure that the hammer and weight for distance events are publicly announced and everybody not connected to the events, be told to leave the Danger Area. Ideally, two separate officials should be standing a safe distance away from the trig, at either sides of the throwing sector. The 3 officials must be vigilant and be assertively pro-active, to ensure that all unrelated officials, photographers, other field users, including athletes and spectators, do not encroach within the Danger Area. This includes the athletes competing in the hammer and weight for distance events, who have a tendency to stand within the Danger Area, awaiting their throw. Once the area is cleared and prior to the start of each throw, the responsible official may consider raising a red flag and/or possibly blowing an air horn or loud whistle, as a warning that a throw is imminent.

For safety reasons, only experienced athletes should be allowed to throw hammers and to throw weights for distance, especially in competitions. Any warm-up or practise throws should be restricted in number and should only be done within the netted safety cage and under the supervision of officials. The actual hammers and the weights used, should be regularly checked to make sure that their shafts and handles are in a good condition and are securely fixed into the weight. Any holes or gaps in the netting should also be repaired.

The athletes should ensure that they take and then retain a firm and controlled grip of the hammer shaft. The use of gloves or a suitable 'tacky' substance is recommended. Soiled or wet shafts should be cleaned and dried. To aid their control of the hammer, prior to each throw, athletes should also ensure that they have a safe and secure stance, by fully 'digging in' with appropriate blades, fitted to the front of their boots.

Athletes also have a responsibility to ensure the Danger Area is safe, before throwing the hammer and weights.

Once a hammer or weight is thrown, the nearest mark made in the ground by the implement, should be marked and later measured. The implement should then be taken safely back to the trig. It should never be thrown back.

At the end of the competition, any divots formed in the ground, should be replaced and all holes should be filled. Prior to storage, all equipment should be checked and repaired if required.

