

Use of sword guidelines



Dear BKA Iaido Members,

I would like to clarify the situation regarding the use of swords in training and our insurance cover. This document builds on that published by Vic Cook Sensei in 2009.

In order to satisfy the requirements of our insurance policy we have to have several assurances in place:

- That all dojo operate within the BKA health and safety guidelines and that each has a risk assessment in place.
- That all dojo activities are supervised by a trained, qualified and insured BKA coach.
- That a trained and qualified first aider is present at all times.
- That our accident record is very good and that very few significant accidents have occurred.

Further to this, we provide assurances about safe systems of practice, including minimum distances between students when training. This has been difficult to establish because, as you know, different kata take up different areas. However, we have concluded that a 9 m² area (i.e. 3 m × 3 m) per exponent be allocated to ensure an acceptable level of risk.

This potential exclusion zone does of course create difficulties in that it would suggest that no person, including a teacher, would be allowed close to an exponent while they were practicing. This not being possible to implement practically we have stated that our coaches are trained to keep a keen eye on distancing and are experienced enough to know when it is safe to approach (known as dynamic risk assessment).

Regarding shinken (including any sharp or semi-sharp swords) specifically: It is the role of the dojo leader/teacher to discuss with their students when is the appropriate time to start using a shinken, typically no earlier than 3rd – 4th dan. However, for the purposes of our insurance cover, **shinken may only be used by members holding the grade of 1st dan (shodan) in iaido, awarded by the BKA.** As it is their responsibility, **the dojo leader/teacher's decision is final.**

The one remaining and significant risk remains around practicing, explaining, demonstrating or otherwise performing techniques with or against other people. The exclusion zone principle described above suggests that we are minimising our members' exposure to cuts or other injuries from other people. This rule is compromised however, if people do demonstrations against other people with swords and would present a potential problem with our insurers if an accident were to occur. Slow and controlled movements may appear to be completely safe but they are in fact an accident waiting to happen.

For this reason we would ask our members:

1. That a shinken is never used in practice, explanation or demonstration, with or against another person or persons. Shinken are solely for use in solo kata practice.
2. That an iaito is never used in practice, explanation or demonstration with or against another person or persons in such a way that an injury may occur.
3. That all practice, explanations or demonstrations of technique, with or against other people are carried out with care using bokuto, shinai, fukuro shinai or similar training equipment.
4. That a 9 m² area per person is allocated whether in the dojo or at a seminar. Rotational practice or decision and dictation of the forms to be practised should be implemented if the training area cannot accommodate all present.
5. When transporting a sword (shinken or iaito) it should be carried in an appropriate sword bag/case – especially when travelling on public transport. The sword should not be taken out of its case until you have arrived at your training venue or your residence.
6. When cleaning a sword in a dojo, great care must be made to prevent injury to another person, eg someone bending down when your kissaki is raised,

With the fact that all of our seminars are extremely well attended and thus are prone to crowding, we especially wish for full implementation of the above from here on.

Please remember that the BKA holds a good reputation for keeping the number of accidents and incidents with a sword low; the responsibility for maintaining this reputation lays on all of us and principally those who teach and lead.

I thank you for your cooperation.

Philip Henderson

BKA Iaido Bucho

Revised by D. Gordon (BKA Safety Officer) in 2022 from Vic Cook's 2009 original document