

ADVISORY: FISH SAFETY ON YOUR PRODUCTION

Fish stress easily and can die suddenly when stressed or when not receiving proper care. This Advisory is designed to assist you in making important decisions regarding the care of fish used on your production.

The most common use of fish in the film industry is fish in bowls and aquariums. Usually the Property or Set Dressing Departments are given the responsibility to acquire and maintain these fish, but may not have the time or knowledge to ensure proper care. **American Humane encourages productions to hire a professional animal handler knowledgeable of the species of fish being used.** Ultimately, production is responsible for the well-being of any animal on a set.

WHAT STRESSES FISH?

A contaminated bowl, aquarium, or another container – Contaminated water – Conditioning removes harmful chemicals such as chlorine.

Improper oxygenation/aeration, PH, etc.

Omitting the conditioning phase or using improper additives to speed up the conditioning process

Using too many fish - Overcrowding creates a lack of oxygenation that fish need to survive

Water temperature not consistent with the species of fish being used

Handling Fish - The skin and scales of fish are sensitive to human handling

Fish out of Water - Fish rely on water to survive; most species do not breathe air and thus will die when out of water

Transporting Fish – Water volume, water quality, acceptable acclimation time, etc. affect the health of fish

Compatibility - Mixing species of fish that do not cohabitate well together

Improper Diet/Overfeeding

IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

- ✓ Utilize an expert knowledgeable in the type(s) of fish being used to set up and monitor fish.
- ✓ Ensure that fish are transported safely using accepted transportation methods for the species and number of fish you are using. In some instances, this may mean the use of live wells to transport and contain fish. All operators of live wells must be trained and experienced to do so.
- ✓ Ensure that the water quality is appropriate for the species of fish being used. Tempering/temperature regulation, Aeration, and oxygenation may be needed. Tempering ensures that water temperature is similar before moving fish into another container. A simple way to temper is to float the bag with fish in the tank or bowl to equalize the temperature and then dump the fish into their container.
- ✓ Make sure to use a surge protector and a reliable power source. A back-up source of power should always be on hand. Make sure to mark all plugs and power sources so that they are not accidentally turned off.
- ✓ Prior approval must be obtained from American Humane when simulating a fishing scene, handling fish, utilizing fish out of water, or releasing fish. (See page 3 of this Advisory for more information) The hooking of a fish for filming purposes is not allowed. At no time shall any string, line, or other material be placed through the mouth or gills.
- ✓ American Humane requires receipts for all fish and aquatic life purchased or leased for a scene that are later returned to the seller or owner, or, or adopted at the end of filming. Fake animals and/or dead animals (or parts) must be documented with a receipt and photographs. This applies whether the source is a prop house or food source. Additional documentation must be submitted to American Humane that the animals were returned or received in good health and condition.

GOLDFISH BOWL/SMALL CONTAINER SET-UP:

1. Buy the largest bowl your budget and space can accommodate. Wash the bowl, gravel, rock, and, decorations with warm water and non-iodized salt. Don't use soap, bleach, or glass cleaners, which may leave residues.
2. Add room-temperature water and the proper amount of conditioners, which remove chlorine and other harmful contaminants.
3. Let the bowl stand for an hour before adding the fish, then float the bag containing your new fish in the bowl for 10-15 minutes. Then, add an equal amount of water from the bowl to the plastic bag and float another 10 minutes. Finally, gently tip the bag and let the fish swim free.
4. Do not buy too many fish or select fish that are too large for the bowl. Goldfish and Siamese Fighting Fish generally do well in fish bowls; many other species may not. If you plan to use a larger number of fish, you may need to purchase a pump/aerator, and filter. If you choose to use fish that are sensitive to the temperature of the water, you will need to purchase a heater.
5. Remember to purchase the appropriate fish food!
6. Water in the bowl should be changed at least once per week and sometimes more often. It should appear crystal clear. Gently net fish and place in a smaller separate container with some water from the bowl. Clean bowl and all objects just as before, then add and condition new room-temperature water. Finally, replace the fish (as you did when you purchased them).
7. Never cover the entire top of a fish bowl; oxygen must be allowed to mix with the water in the bowl.
8. Do not keep your fish bowl in direct sunlight, as it can overheat very quickly. Ice cubes in a plastic bag can be used to cool down the water temperature if the bowl must be placed near a heat source or in direct sunlight. Watch that the temperature of the water doesn't drop too low with the addition of ice cube.
9. Fishbowls should be used for temporary housing and are not recommended for long-term housing. If fish bowls will be used for more than one day, fish should be introduced in an aquarium setup with aeration and bacteria setup and only placed in bowls when needed for filming.

AQUARIUM/LARGE CONTAINER SET –UP:

1. Wash the tank and all submerged equipment and decorations as described above.
2. Install filters, heaters, air pump, and decorations. Then add water and condition with appropriate chemicals to remove chlorine and other harmful contaminants.
3. Establishing the bacterial culture is a crucial process and should not be rushed. This is known as the "conditioning period" and generally requires three to six weeks, depending on the aquarium conditions and temperatures. During this time, your tank goes thru several drastic chemical changes in ammonia, nitrate, nitrite, and pH levels.
4. During this conditioning period, start by adding a few of only the hardiest fish - goldfish, barbs, and platys. Follow the process outlined above to temper/acclimate the fish to the new aquarium. Monitor the fish closely for signs of stress or ammonia or nitrite poisoning (lack of feeding, loss of color, clamped fins and increased respiration).
5. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU DO NOT ADD ANY MEDICATIONS OR OTHER CHEMICALS INTO THE WATER DURING THE CONDITIONING PHASE.
6. It is best to add only a few fish at a time, about one or two a week, and carefully monitor water quality to make sure you are not overloading your tank. Overcrowding a tank can lead to hypoxia, where fish rise quickly to the water's surface, gasping for air, and can have deadly consequences. Hypoxia can also occur during a filtration/aeration system malfunction or power outage, so a backup plan should be in place. You can monitor oxygen levels by using a water test kit. In the event of hypoxia, sealing your fish in a plastic bag with one-third water and two-thirds oxygen can keep your fish alive for 24 hours or more as an emergency treatment.
7. If you can't wait, the conditioning process can be hastened by seeding your aquarium with gravel or bioballs from an already established system. You must make sure you are not introducing any parasites or other diseases into your clean tank. This process, although not always safe, can shorten the duration of the conditioning period by 9-10 days.

HANDLING FISH AND FISH OUT OF WATER:

- Advance approval from American Humane is required should a scene call for a fish to be out of water and/or handled either by hands or by mechanical means, such as nets.
- An expert knowledgeable in the specific type of fish shall be present to assist in determining how to structure the scene without harm to the fish.
- Consideration must be given to the species that are most tolerant of this activity (e.g. catfish, carp, perch, bowfin, lungfish, mudskipper and tarpon). These fish have *air bladders* and are more tolerant of being out of water for short periods. Other types of fish, such as striped bass, trout and salmon, are more sensitive to being out of water and to human handling and are not recommended.
- The oils, salts and heat in human skin can be toxic to fish; therefore, the hands of the person handling the fish must be clean and free of contaminants prior to filming and must be wet when handling fish.
- Only fine-mesh nets may be used, to prevent damage to the fish. Any use of fishing line, fishing nets and Boga Grips™ shall be approved, in advance, by American Humane. Improper use of nets and grips can result in injury to fish. Many fish have very delicate barbs and fins that can be caught in coarse nets.
- A fish may not be out of water longer than 30 seconds without prior approval from American Humane. The time a fish is out of water depends on the species, the environmental conditions (water temperature, air temperature, water quality, whether the fish will be held in direct sunlight or in shade). There are some fish that should not be taken out of the water at all. Fish must be rotated so that none are used twice in a row, and no fish may be used more than three times in one day.
- “Tempering” a fish is extremely important. Make sure the water temperature for fish is within a few degrees between their holding tank and the waters where the fish may be used (outside water source). Tempering is done by taking the temperature of both water sources and gradually adjusting the water temperatures until the holding tank water temperature is within a few degrees of the outside water source.

RELEASE OF FISH:

Very few animals can be released into the wild. In addition to federal, state, and local laws and regulations, American Humane’s *Guidelines for The Safe Use of Animals in Filmed Media* have strict requirements regarding the release of fish.

- CONTACT AMERICAN HUMANE FOR ADVANCE APPROVAL, WHEN CONSIDERING THE RELEASE OF FISH AND/OR MARINE LIFE.
- The permanent release of non-indigenous or invasive species is prohibited. American Humane requires that production and the Animal Handler MUST have a plan in place to prevent escape.
- American Humane must be provided with proof of proper release permits and/or written permission of the property owner for the permanent release of indigenous animals granted by the appropriate federal, state, and locality. Appropriate documentation that outlines why the location provides for a suitable release should include the following:
 - The location should not allow fishing and the location must provide an appropriate habitat for the species being released.
 - The release should be accomplished in the appropriate season/time of year to ensure survivability

AMERICAN HUMANE’S RESOURCE CENTER

American Humane’s Resource Center provides guidance to productions regarding best animal welfare practices, achieving desired animal action and care, licensing/permitting, transportation at no charge. Contact us at 1-800-677-3420 or email filmunit@americanhumane.org.

For information regarding fees, [CLICK HERE](#).

To register your production, [CLICK HERE](#)