

CONSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT

What Does the Department Do?

The Construction Department builds the scenery for filming. In the studio the department builds decks, walls, ceilings, flooring, stairs, doors, windows, etc. Fine finish work is also done, such as moulding, cabinetry, and custom furniture. Greenery, such as trees and shrubs are added. Metal set elements are assembled or welded. On location the department adds scenery elements or renovates existing structures.

Job Titles

Shop Crafts/ Carpenter

Scenery building craftspeople, often called Prop makers, Shop Crafts, Model makers, Carpenters and Welders, for the purpose of people seeking to join the Permit list of IATSE 489, are listed under the category Construction (Shop Crafts/ Carpenter). For the sake of this description the term Carpenter is used.

Because the majority of scenery is built from wood and metal, Carpenters have skills in common with the construction trades. They have knowledge of hand tools like hammers and screwdrivers, etc. They use hand power tools like circular saws, jigsaws, routers, drills and cordless drills and pneumatic tools like nail guns and narrow, medium and wide crown staple guns. They also use shop equipment like table saws, drill presses, radial arm saws, planers and shapers.

Carpenters read blueprints and working drawings. They use tape measures and have the ability to do basic shop math in feet and inches.

They have knowledge of the different types of materials common to a scene shop, including 1x4, 2x4, plywood, luan and laminates. They know and use a variety of fasteners, especially screws, nails, and staples.

It is a very physical craft involving lifting (a sheet of 3/4" plywood weighs 60 lbs) and handling of raw materials and finished set pieces.

They are required to climb ladders. Often work is on platforms, sometimes 30 ft above the floor. They are encouraged to get certification to use scissor lifts, Condor-type cranes, forklifts and Lull-type telescoping forklifts.

Scenery varies from somewhat rough carpentry to fine woodwork. Carpenters know how to build typical set pieces like luan covered flats, and plywood 2x4 platforms. More advanced builders know how to construct doors, windows, counters and cabinets, and custom pieces. Many have skill in applying Formica-type laminates.

Construction is a wide-ranging craft that requires craftspeople to have or develop a wide range of skills, and demands stamina and precision. The ever-changing projects can make it a very enjoyable and rewarding crafts.

What should a first time carpenter bring?

Carpenters should bring with them gloves, tape measure, pencils, tool belt, nail pouch, hammer, pliers and cordless screw gun.

Construction Coordinator

The Construction Coordinator meets with the production designer and art director to analyze the drawings for the studio sets and the needs of location scenery. The Construction Coordinator decides, with input from forepersons, how the scenery will be built, orders the materials and equipment, arranges for transport of materials and scenery. They oversee the schedule and budget of Construction, Greens and Paint. They hire all carpenters and normally choose the Key Scenic and Greens Coordinator.

Head Foreperson

A Head Foreperson is chosen by and works closely with the Construction Coordinator to help analyze plans and drawings, to decide how scenery is to be built, what materials to use, choosing forepersons, gang bosses and crew, and delegating responsibilities. The Head Foreperson is on the floor, monitoring safety, quality, adherence to schedule, monitoring materials and supplies, and special needs like scaffolding, scissor lift, etc.

Foreperson

Under the overall supervision of the Construction Coordinator and Head Foreperson, a Foreperson has the responsibility of a particular set or location. They delegate responsibilities to Gang Bosses and their respective carpenters or welders. The Utility foreperson helps decide the overall organization of materials and supplies, and supervises the cleanliness and order of the work spaces.

Gang Boss

A Gang Boss supervises a small group of carpenters or welders for specific tasks.

Utility

Utility workers are supervised by the Utility Foreman. Utility is responsible for unloading and organizing materials as they arrive from vendors. They also keep the shop, set or location clean and organized. They help load and unload scenery from on shop, set or location to another. One or more members of the Utility crew are very competent forklift drivers.

Buyer

The Construction Buyer assists the Construction Coordinator with administrative duties, such as keeping track of crew time cards and receipts and ordering materials and supplies.

Tool person

The tool person keeps the tools in operating order, including maintenance, ordering parts, and repairing. They also order and organize expendable items like fasteners, glue, etc.

Welder

Welders construct scenery under the supervision of a Welding Foreman. Welders are familiar with the properties of metal, especially steel and aluminum, and are certified in welding techniques like TIG, MIG and stick welding.