<u>Edmonton Historical Martial Arts</u>
Safety Philosophy

Contents

Definitions:

Participants: All individuals who attend a HEMA event organized by Edmonton Historical Martial Arts. This is inclusive of students, guests, instructors, event support staff, judges, spectators, and any and all members of the general public in the vicinity.

Leadership: Refers to those members of EHMA's Board and Council, as well as any event organizing staff or volunteers, who are entrusted with planning, organizing, and implementing classes, tournaments, workshops, and any other HEMA event.

Event: Refers to a planned, official EHMA-run HEMA activity, such as a weekly class, intramural, tournament, workshop, sparring meet, or any other fencing activity organized by EHMA and covered under EHMA's insurance.

Incident: An occurrence during fencing when safety principles are violated by one or both fencers, regardless of whether or not this actually results in injury.

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment. In HEMA, this means gear worn on the body to reduce the risk of injury by physical protection from impact or penetration (Masks, padded jackets, gloves, etc). This is distinguished from *armour,* which for HEMA purposes means equipment meant for recreating armoured fighting techniques from historical sources.

Section 1. Purpose

1.1 Edmonton Historical Martial Arts strives to maintain a safe environment for all participants at all our events. Safety of practice is our first and foremost concern.

1.2 The club has addressed safety across multiple policy documents and meeting notes. As such, the written record of the EHMA approach to safety is currently fragmentary. Communicating our safety expectations presently relies heavily on club leadership and senior members passing on information and expectations orally to new members. This creates a potential for miscommunication, misunderstanding, or failure to communicate key details.

1.3 This document will record EHMA's philosophy and approach to safety in a single, cohesive reference point. This is meant to be a SUMMARY and an OVERVIEW of our club's approach and policies on safety. The intent is to enhance communication and understanding of safety within our club, as well as to enable us to more effectively share our understanding with others in the community for their own benefit as well.

1.4 If at any point this document clashes with the EHMA Policy Manual, the Policy Manual shall be taken as the authority.

Section 2. The Margin of Safety

2.1 As a martial art and a combative sport, HEMA poses an inherent degree of risk to participants. As such, no absolute guarantee of safety can be made to any participant. At the same time, the benefits of martial arts (i.e: Fitness, camaraderie, learning, culture, etc) can only be gained if the students are safe *enough* from risk of injury that they can fully participate without undue fear or unnecessary pain. For purposes of this philosophy, this state of "safe enough" will be referred to as the margin of safety.

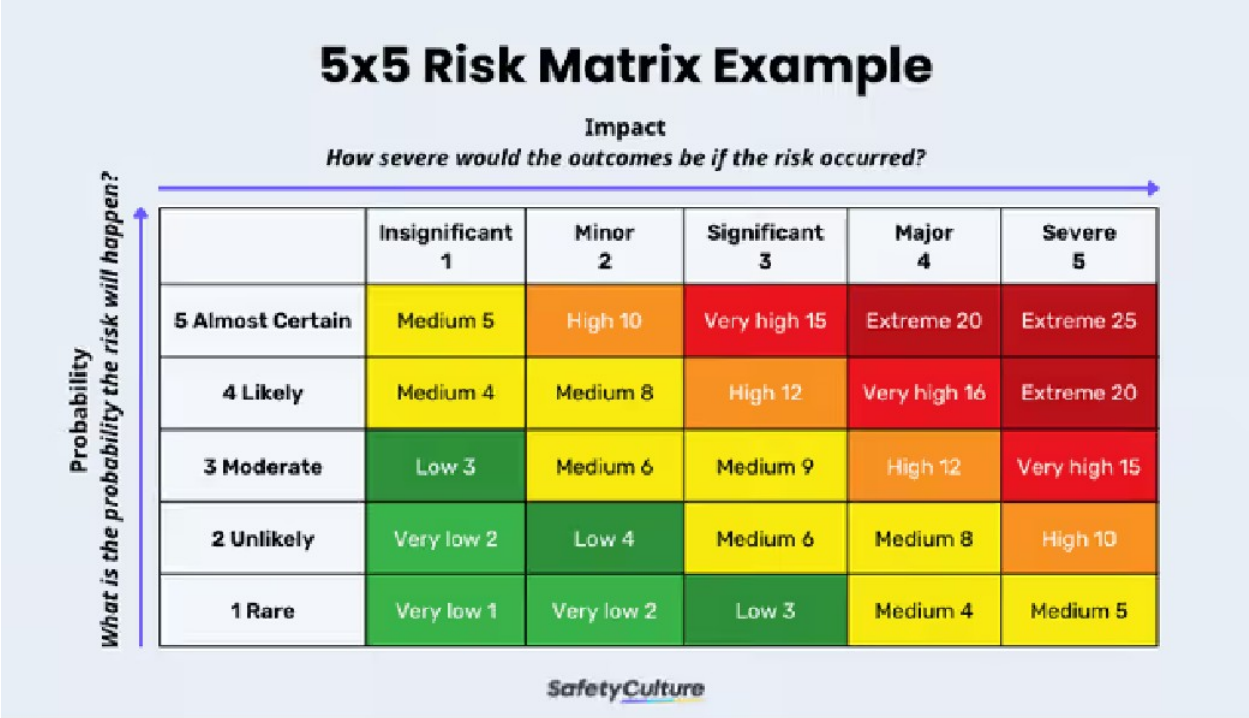
2.2. Safety requires the active support and participation of all fencers and staff at any event. However, it is the responsibility of leadership to ensure that all fencers understand their role and the expectations of the activity in regard to maintaining a margin of safety.

2.3. It is also the responsibility of leadership to supervise fencing at any activity, and to intervene if the margin of safety is being crossed by any fencer, on purpose or by accident. Interventions are covered in Section 9 Interventions.

Section 3. Risk Assessment, Management, Mitigation

3.1 EHMA utilizes the standard risk assessment matrix. This means all risks need to be evaluated

based on their likelihood and their severity, and leadership must make decisions on risk management and mitigation for fencing activities based on this assessment.



3.2. It is not possible to lay down any single, hard rule for risk management or mitigation, as risks vary. General principles should be utilized, and leadership must utilize sound judgment. At all stages, the physical safety and well-being of all participants should be considered the paramount factor in decision-making.

3.3. In assessing the severity of a risk, the key question is: What would be the life impact on the individual if this risk were to actually occur to them? Example: A minor bruise poses only minor to moderate pain, and will heal in days, therefore this is a low severity risk. A major concussion can lead to life-altering brain injury for the individual, therefore is a high severity risk.

3.4. Risk management for our purposes will mean taking steps to reduce the likelihood of a risk occurring, in situations where the risk's severity cannot be eliminated or mitigated. Example: Strikes to the the back of the head and neck pose a considerable risk of injury, even with PPE, therefore this risk must be managed by prohibiting this strike from being used by fencers.

3.5. Risk mitigation means taking steps to reduce the severity or potential impact of a risk, in situations where the probability of a risk cannot be reduced by management. Example: In fencing, fencers will be struck at some time by the opponent's weapons as this is inherent to the activity. Wearing appropriate PPE like masks and jackets mitigates the potential for injury from this risk.

3.6. Extreme risks (Medium to high severity, high probability) should be avoided or forbidden completely. Example: Fencing with sharps without any PPE has an extreme risk of injury or death to both fencers, and thus is entirely forbidden.

3.7. Moderate risks (Low to medium severity, medium to high probability) generally must be mitigated or managed to reduce their severity and probability as far as possible. Example: Fencers are sometimes going to get hit. Without PPE, this poses severe risks such as broken bones or injured eyes. With PPE, risks are moderate (Bruises rather than broken bones). With both PPE and appropriate fencing behaviour, risks are further reduced.

3.8. Minor risks (Low severity, low to high probability) are generally either risks which have already been mitigated to the highest possible extent (i.e: In full contact HEMA, one cannot avoid the risk of even a minor bruise), or risks too inconsequential to merit an organizational response. Individuals are to be encouraged to self-manage and self-mitigate these risks. Example: Sweaty gear sometimes leads to rashes or blisters for fencers. While uncomfortable, these risks are generally minor. Leadership can help fencers self-mitigate by informing them of the risk and assisting them in adopting appropriate personal mitigations.

Section 4. The Safety Triangle

4.1 There are three factors that affect the safety of fencing in HEMA:

A. PPE
B. Swords
C. Fencer Behaviour

4.2. PPE, as noted in Definitions, means equipment worn on the body to mitigate the risks of injury. This includes masks, gloves, jackets, padding, hard joint protection, testicle or breast protection, and anything else worn to mitigate injury risk.

4.3. Swords, for purposes of this document, refers to the tools used in HEMA training or competition to strike at the opponent in a fencing bout.

4.4. Fencer behaviour means how the fencers conduct themselves during bouting with training partners or competition opponents. This includes such factors as force levels, permitted and forbidden actions, permitted and excluded targeting, as well as general procedures such as salutes, halts, and signals.

4.5 The greatest safety we can achieve within the context of full contact HEMA is when all three of these elements are made as effective as possible and are aligned with each other. Safe swords,

safe PPE, safe fencer behaviours, lead to safe fencing for all.

Section 5: PPE

5.1 All fencers must wear appropriate PPE for all contact drills or bouting. Fencers require protection for the head, neck, torso, arms, and legs, as well as testicles or breasts if applicable.

5.2. Head: All fencers must wear an appropriate fencing mask with a protective mesh, bib, and enough padding. Back of head protection is also mandatory. In general, an FIE 350N or 1200N certified mask with an additional back of head protector from a leadership-approved HEMA manufacturer is the minimum standard. Alternatives such as the Horsebows helmet may also be acceptable, but must be inspected and approved by leadership prior to use. Homemade or improvised head protection or protection for other sports (Motorcycle helmets, etc) are not acceptable.

5.3. Neck: All fencers must have three layers of protection for their neck: The bib of their mask, a blade catcher collar on their jacket, and a rigid and padded gorget. Soft neck guards as used in hockey are not acceptable. Gorgets from HEMA manufacturers are generally acceptable, but must be inspected prior to use if there is any question. Some sports neck guards, such as hockey GOALIE neck guards, are acceptable, but must be inspected and approved by leadership prior to use if there is any question about their appropriateness.

5.4. Torso: No fencing shall be done without a padded and puncture-resistant jacket, from a manufacturer approved by the club. Jackets must be at minimum 350N puncture resistant, must fit appropriately, and fully cover the fencer from the neck to the wrists and the hips. Reenactment clothing, costumes, or jackets obtained from non-approved sources (e.g. Etsy) will not be accepted. It is important that the jacket have enough padding for vulnerable areas such as the collarbone. Padding can be supplemented with additional garments such as a padded rugby shirt. A rigid plastic chest guard is not required, but is strongly recommended. If applicable, chest protection should also include rigid protection for breasts.

5.5 Arms: As noted above, the sleeves of the fencing jacket must cover the arms down to the wrist. In addition, the fencer will also need appropriate fencing gloves and rigid protection for the elbow. Forearm protectors are not required, but strongly recommended, especially when the jacket has thinner padding on the arms.

Gloves are of high importance for PPE, as hands are frequently hit within HEMA fencing. Fencers shall wear gloves approved for use by EHMA leadership, from reputable manufacturers such as Sparring Gloves, HF Armoury, or CFHG. New glove models shall be inspected and approved prior to use. Gloves intended for use with light weapons (e.g. A light leather glove

meant for smallsword) will not be used with heavy weapons (Longswords, sabres, arming swords). In general, the heavier the weapon and the more open its hilt design the more heavy-duty the gloves must be. Gloves must also fit properly and not be damaged. They must fully cover the hand, all fingers, the thumb, the knuckles, and the wrist.

5.6. Legs: Fencers must wear rigid protection for their knees and for their shins. Additional padding for the upper legs and thighs is not required, but highly recommended. Knee protection must fully protect the knee from the front and from both sides. “Wings” to add to the side protection are not required, but highly recommended. Shin guards must be rigid and must cover the shin from the knee guard to the ankles. A highly recommended example of a shin guard that meets all requirements is the Harrow Probot field hockey shin.

Fencers shall also wear appropriate pants, leaving no exposed skin.

If applicable, an athletic cup is required for testicle protection for all fencers who require it. Athletic cups are to be worn under the clothing, using a properly fitting jockstrap or athletic underwear. It cannot function if it is not properly fitted or is worn incorrectly. An external codpiece may be worn as a substitute, provided it is fully sized and protects from all angles, especially rising strikes from below.

5.7. All PPE shall be inspected prior to its first use by a member of the leadership in regular classes. PPE for private areas, such as athletic cups, does not need to be inspected but leadership will verbally confirm that the fencer is wearing it. Individuals are encouraged to inspect their PPE for private areas themselves prior to use. At tournaments, all competitors shall have their PPE inspected by staff prior to being permitted to compete.

5.8. In the event of an incident associated with a PPE failure, either PPE breaking in use or failing to reasonably prevent injury, EHMA leadership will investigate the PPE failure and, if possible, identify any contributing factors associated. If a previously approved piece of equipment is positively identified as a factor in an injury, EHMA may revise recommendations or prohibit previously approved PPE based on new information. EHMA leadership will also seek to share this information with other HEMA community organizations, to better contribute to the community’s safety culture and standards.

Section 6: Swords

6.1. Fencers shall use a sword approved for use by leadership before engaging in bouting. Fencing shall be done with swords forged by approved, reputable manufacturers, such as Sigi, or Regenyei. Homemade or amateur forged swords shall not be used.

6.2. The principal factors for determining the safety of a sword are: Weight, flex, and design.

6.3. All else being equal, as force = mass x acceleration, a lighter sword will transfer less force in a strike at the same speed compared to a heavier sword. Therefore, lighter swords are generally safer than heavier ones.

The weights of swords vary by length, design, and type. There is no single “safe” weight or “unsafe” weight. A safe longsword weight may be unsafe on a different weapon. However, as light swords are generally safer than heavy ones, swords at the lighter ends of historical ranges should be generally preferred. Example: Historical longswords ranged from 1kg to 3kg+. In modern fencing longswords, weights of 1.5kg and below are generally preferable for safety.

All swords should have their weight verified by a scale prior to use.

6.4. Flex refers to how easily the sword’s blade buckles under linear compression. Like the crumple zone designed into cars, the flex of a sword blade reduces the force transferred into the target in a linear impact, as in a thrust. As thrusts concentrate their force on a small point, they can pose a significant danger of injury. A flexible sword is essential for safe thrusting play in fencing.

As with weight, a lower flex (meaning less weight applied to the blade before it bends) is generally safer. For longsword, we have found it best to use blades with a flex equal to or less than 16kg, measured by the Franklin buckling test.

For more details on flex testing, and for procedures on the Franklin buckling test, consult this reference: https://swordstem.com/2022/10/17/sword-flex/

6.5 Design refers to all other aspects of how the sword is constructed, in particular how its construction contributes to its safety of use, or creates new risks. This can include elements like the design of the point, the crossguard and pommel, as well as factors like the point of balance.

In general, a wider surface of impact distributes force more evenly while a smaller surface concentrates force. As such, we want swords which do not have thin edges or narrow points, either on the blade or on any of the elements of the hilt. Even if the blade is not sharpened, a thin edge or narrow point can still pose considerable risk of injury. A safe sword should have wide edges, a flared or rolled tip, and a crossguard and pommel that are wide and rounded, not narrow and pointed. The safety of the tip can be further enhanced with a thermoplastic cover. Rubber stoppers are not permitted, for these tend to encourage thrusts to “plant” rather than “glance”.

Another relevant factor is point of balance. If the blade's mass is concentrated at its end, it will hit harder than a blade whose mass is concentrated in the handle. The principle here is similar to a hammer: The hammerhead hits harder than the hammer handle, even though the mass is unchanged either way. For all these reasons, a safe sword should either have a feder-type design or be balanced by blade taper and hilt elements to ensure its point of balance is as close to the handle as possible.

6.6. Prior to use in regular training, any new sword should be inspected by EHMA leadership. At competitions, all swords will be inspected by event staff prior to use. Swords with unsafe design elements, excessive weight, or inadequate flex will be prohibited from use.

Section 7. Fencer Behaviour

7.1. While PPE and safe swords reduce the risk of full contact HEMA fencing in significant ways, they still depend on the behaviour of the fencer in order to achieve safety. A safe sword turned around and used to bludgeon in a "mordschlag" is still dangerous. Therefore, fencer behaviour is the final and most critical factor in safe HEMA practice.

7.2. The principal elements in safe fencer behaviour are: Force levels, permitted and forbidden strikes, targeting, and bouting procedures.

7.3. Force levels refer to how hard fencers strike at each other when fencing. It also includes such factors as general speed and "intensity" of the fencing. The competitive and full-contact nature of HEMA tends to make fencers swing faster and harder at each other. When one fencer hits harder, their opponent generally also escalates to match. It is therefore imperative that all fencers maintain control and moderation of their force levels, only striking as hard as is necessary to score a hit, and no further.

Force levels can be mitigated by fencers by training to stop strikes mid-swing, as well as adopting techniques to reduce force transfer in their strikes. Examples include pulling thrusts back or off the target after impact, or the "kendo cut", in which a cut is bounced forward and up off the target after striking. In general, strikes should only reach the target on the opponent's body and not be delivered with "follow through" in the manner of tatami cutting.

It is important that fencers regularly calibre their force levels with each other, and inform each other if the other is striking too hard. In competition, judges should inform fencers when they are at a good level of force and should proactively communicate to avoid escalation. If a strike is insufficient, judges should inform fencers that the judge needs to see clearer intent or technique, not "more force". No fencer should ever be told to hit harder. The need to strike fast enough to score creates all the force necessary for HEMA's purposes, additional force beyond that level is a

safety risk for no further benefit.

7.4. There are many potential ways of striking with a sword, but only some can be made safe enough for use in full contact fencing. Generally, fencing swords are designed for safety in conventional strikes with the blade. Strikes with the crossguard, hilt, or pommel, while historical, are much harder to be made safely. Therefore, all bouting will have both permitted and forbidden types of strikes.

A further consideration is how controllable a strike is. With a longsword, a strike with the blade with both hands on the hilt is generally well within the fencer's control. On the opposite extreme, throwing one's sword at the opponent means you have no control at all once it leaves your hands. Controlled actions are safer than uncontrolled ones.

At EHMA, conventional cuts and thrusts with the blade are generally permitted. Single handed strikes such as the "Gayszlen", made by gripping the pommel with one hand and 'whipping' the sword, are much harder to control. They are permitted by some clubs, but we generally prohibit them. Throwing the sword, or striking with the crossguard, or turning the sword around and bludgeoning with the hilt are forbidden.

Pommel strikes may be performed with a mimed action or a light tap to the front of the mask only to signal that a pommel strike has been made. Full force pommel strikes are not permitted.

7.5. Targeting refers to where on the opponent's body the fencer's strikes are aimed. Strikes are safer in some areas and riskier in others. Fencers are to direct their strikes only to those targets where they can be safely delivered.

This means strikes are to be delivered to the front of the opponent's body and no further to the rear than the flanks of their torso. Strikes to the back, especially the back of the head and neck, are not permitted. Fencers must both refrain from striking their opponents' back, and refrain from exposing their back, especially the back of the head and neck.

Additionally, strikes are only to be delivered to any target which is covered by PPE. Example: If a fencer is not wearing leg guards, fencing can be conducted with no permitted strikes to the legs.

7.6. Bout procedures refers to the rules, expectations, and behaviours both fencers observe to organize the bout and maintain safety for both fencers throughout. This includes signals for when to begin fencing, when to pause fencing, and when to stop fencing.

No fencer shall deliver a strike to any opponent who is not ready and actively prepared to engage and defend themselves with fencing actions. To signal readiness to begin, both fencers must

salute their opponent by raising their sword to their face and then lowering it and adopting a guard position. Additional courtesies or flourishes are permitted, but not required.

A pause may be necessary for a fencer to fix gear, to discuss an issue or concern, or to speak to a coach. If the fencer wishes for a pause, they must clearly signal this to their partner by stepping well back, raising a hand, and lowering their sword in a way that cannot be mistaken for a guard. A verbal request is also helpful.

If any fencer or participant observes an imminent or critical safety hazard or unsafe behaviour during fencing, anyone may call “halt” to any bout at any time. When a halt is called, both fencers must cease fencing, lower their swords, and step well back from each other.

Bouts within EHMA are customarily conducted to the first hit. That is, the fencing proceeds until one fencer has scored a solid scoring strike on the other. After said strike, the fencers pause, back away to starting distance once again, and then begin a new exchange. “Continuous fencing”, without said pauses, is permissible but can only be done either under instructor direction or by previous mutual agreement between fencers.

Fencing may proceed to a previously agreed number of passes, or proceed without any agreement on a stopping point. When fencers wish to stop fencing, it is courteous to provide their partner with a countdown to when they wish to stop. Example: “Let’s do two more exchanges and then halt for water”. However, this is not required. If either fencer feels they must stop, they may at any time say “I need a break” and fencing will immediately cease.

Section 8. Communication and the Safety Card System

8.1 Dialogue and open communication are essential to maintaining a safe environment during combative sports such as HEMA.

To that end, EHMA has adopted a “safety card system” to encourage our fencers to maintain open communication with each other during sparring and training.

These cards are a framework for communication, and are not a system for official infraction. Official infraction lies with the EHMA Board and will follow preexisting infraction policy.

8.2 The safety card system is as follows:

> “Yellow Card”. When two fencers are sparring or training, and one feels that the other has behaved unsafely in some way, that fencer may say “yellow card”. This signals to the other fencer that they will stop fencing and have a conversation, where the card-giver

may inform their partner what the safety concern is. Examples of cardable behaviour may include excessive force, exposing the back of the head, dropping to a knee while lunging, or any other behaviour that increases risk of injury to either fencer.

"Orange Card". If the issue is repeating, or the fencer wishes to bring an issue to the attention of the instructor, they may say "orange card". This signals a stop in fencing, and that the pair of fencers will go find the class instructor and have a conversation as a group about the concern. When an orange card has been said, the instructor shall be responsible to determine whether fencing can continue after the conversation or to escalate to:

"Red Card". If the instructor determines that the safety concern is sufficiently serious or has been a repeating issue, they may issue the fencer a "red card", which signals that the fencer will not be permitted to continue fencing for that session. After a red card has been issued, the fencer in question shall receive re-instruction on proper force levels, safety procedures, or any other matter relevant to the safety concern.

A red card is not an official infraction. The fencer is permitted to return to EHMA at the next sessions and continue fencing after re-instruction.

8.3 Instructors shall report all red cards issued to the Board. This is to facilitate tracking of any potential safety concerns or infractable conduct from fencers.

Orange cards may also be reported, at the Instructor's discretion. Minor concerns which were escalated to orange cards do not need to be reported, but Instructors are encouraged to report any orange cards which indicate a chronic safety concern or which may require further intervention from the EHMA Leadership.

8.4 Fencers are encouraged to communicate with their partners and are not required to limit conversations about safety to the safety card system. The system is to encourage and enhance the culture of safety at EHMA.

Fencers are also encouraged to report any developing chronic safety concerns (i.e: A particular fencer who consistently hits too hard, consistently exposes back of head, etc) to the leadership.

Section 9. Interventions

9.1. At any EHMA event, leadership is responsible for maintaining the safety for all participants. Maintaining safety will at times require leadership to take specific actions for the sake of safety. We call these actions "interventions".

9.2. Any participant unwilling or unable to comply with interventions for the sake of safety may be removed from the event by leadership. Depending on the circumstances and severity of their refusal, they may be barred or banned from future events.

9.3. Interventions may be divided into preventative interventions and responsive interventions.

9.4. A preventative intervention is an action taken prior to any incidents. Their purpose is to reduce the likelihood of incidents in the first place. Example: A safety briefing for all competitors prior to beginning bouts at a tournament.

Risk reduction by preventative interventions are preferable, in that "an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure". We would rather proactively avoid injury or safety violations in the first place, rather than have to deal with their repercussions. As such, EHMA will seek to use preventative interventions as far as is effectively possible.

9.5. Responsive interventions are those interventions taken by leadership after an incident has occurred. Their purpose is to prevent repeat incidents, and to reinforce the culture and expectations of safety at EHMA events. Examples include replacing PPE or swords with safer options, revising guidelines or rules, or re-training fencers on appropriate force levels or on force reduction techniques. If the severity of the incident demands it, leadership may also remove a fencer from bouting or from a competition.

Responsive interventions are only taken after an incident, therefore they are a less preferable option than preventative interventions. However, it is still essential that leadership take responsive interventions when and where appropriate. Safety must not only be stated or requested, it requires active enforcement from leadership.

Section 10. Investigations

10.1. All safety-related incidents that occur at an EHMA event should be thoroughly investigated by leadership.

10.2. The purpose of investigations is to identify WHAT happened, WHY it happened, any contributing factors, and to make recommendations for changes in policy, procedures, guidelines, or equipment in order to avoid future incidents.

10.3. Leadership shall designate a single investigator for a single incident. Other staff or volunteers may assist the investigator, but the investigator shall be the final responsible party for the investigation, for communicating with involved fencers, and presenting findings to the leadership.

10.4 The investigator shall collect all relevant information on the incident. An investigation can be as brief as inspecting equipment for defects, or can involve in-depth fact-finding interviews with witnesses and reviewing of footage. The objective should be to have as thorough and objective an understanding of the incident as possible, in order to make informed decisions for future safety policy.

10.5. When the investigator has concluded their fact-finding process, they will present their findings to the leadership either verbally or in writing. Their report should include all relevant details about how and why the incident occurred, and recommendations for mitigations or management of this risk in the future.

10.6. It is EHMA leadership's responsibility to determine and enact necessary changes in safety policy after receiving the investigator's report.

Section 11. Social, Cultural, and Emotional Considerations

11.1 The primary focus of safety policy is on the physical safety of all participants, and reduction of the risk of injury as far as is practical. Nevertheless, safety in HEMA is inherently a matter of the behaviour of the human beings which participate in HEMA. As such, maintaining safety is also affected by the social, cultural, and emotional factors of human behaviour. Leadership must take these factors into consideration.

11.2 As noted above, the behaviour of fencers is the most critical factor in the safety triangle. Human behaviour is not entirely logical or rational, but is strongly influenced by our emotions and by the expectations of our social and cultural environment. In order for fencers to consistently behave safely, leadership must maintain an environment which enables and supports them to do so.

11.3. Fencing can involve intense emotions from fencers. This is particularly the case in competition. Emotions such as fear, anxiety, competitive drive, or anger can cause fencers to behave in ways during bouts they would not normally. This can include escalating their force levels, striking more frequently, taking larger risks, or losing control of their targeting.

Safe fencing can only be done by fencers who are in control of themselves and are emotionally well-regulated during their bouts. It is normal and natural to have emotions elevate during a combative experience like fencing, but the fencer must maintain control of their behaviour.

Judges, coaches, staff, and leadership generally should monitor fencers for signs of deteriorating emotional regulation. Fencers can also support and assist each other by monitoring their partners

during bouts. If a fencer is losing emotional control or beginning to act more wildly, their partner, coach, or leadership can intervene by taking a break, verbally checking if the individual is okay, and allowing the individual to take deep breaths, re-centre, and collect themselves.

If a fencer is becoming dangerously uncontrolled and is unable to collect themselves, then a coach, judge, or leadership member may stop and remove them from fencing. Their partner also has the right to stop fencing and refuse to continue with an uncontrolled partner. When an individual has been removed from fencing, they are to be directed to remove themselves from the fencing area, put down their sword, and remove their gear. They may also be encouraged to drink water, do breathing exercises, or take a brief walk away from the event to cool and collect themselves.

11.4. As emotional state impacts fencing behaviour, so too does the social environment impact the fencer's emotional state. If the social environment is welcoming and supportive, it is easier for the fencer to maintain emotional regulation. Contrarily, a hostile and unpleasant social environment is more likely to disturb the fencer's emotional state. This makes it more difficult for the fencer to fully benefit from their training, but it also poses safety risks.

For all these reasons, it is imperative that EHMA leadership maintains a positive social environment for all participants. Hateful behaviour, discriminatory language or conduct, harassment, or bullying, are all ethically unacceptable to EHMA's code of values, but they also increase safety risks to participants by creating emotional disturbance in participants. Additionally, hateful behaviour signals that the hateful individual is unwilling or unable to treat others with respect and dignity, and this sort of individual is a safety hazard to others and cannot be safely tolerated in a combative sport.

Leadership can maintain a positive social environment by informing all participants of the EHMA's social expectations, such as through the Code of Conduct, and by clearly articulating expectations in briefings and instruction. They also must lead by example, by consistently modeling positive behaviour in how they teach, coach, judge, and interact with others at all HEMA events.

11.5 Culture refers to the set of beliefs, norms, behaviours, and customs that define a particular human social group.

The ultimate intended end-state of EHMA's safety philosophy is to create and maintain a culture of safety, inclusive of all EHMA members. We aim to inculcate good principles of behaviour for safety in all of our members. If each member fully understands and grasps these principles, and is equipped and supported to enact them, then all members will be able to independently and proactively maintain safety for themselves and for their fencing partners.

If we successfully build and maintain this culture of safety, then that will enable EHMA members to gain the greatest benefits of HEMA practice while being confident their physical safety will be prioritized at all times during all events. It is not possible to practice HEMA without risk, but a culture of safety enables the benefits of martial arts, with as low a risk of injury as practicable.