

# Prop gun set tragedy could change Hollywood forever

Marco della Cava  
USA TODAY

SANTA FE, N.M. – Last Thursday at 7:16 a.m., the sun's gold rays painted the wooden Old West buildings of a ranch that has hosted Hollywood movies ranging from 1955's "The Man from Laramie" to 2011's "Cowboys and Aliens."

But in the pre-dawn hours, trouble already was brewing at Bonanza Creek Ranch. Camera crew members, upset over working conditions, were packing their bags. Their exodus would lead to the arrival of a replacement crew and, hours later, a tragic death.

Just before filming resumed after a lunch break, a prop gun fired during rehearsal by Alec Baldwin, star and producer of the period Western "Rust," killed cinematographer Halyna Hutchins, 42, and injured director Joel Souza, 48. Police arrived and questions mushroomed.

The specifics of the horrific accident continue to unspool as those involved speak with investigators. But already it is shaping up as a watershed that could bring lasting changes to an industry also grappling with COVID-19 delays and the financial impact of our new streaming habits.

"This is a breakthrough moment, and it's created the opportunity to make real changes to make sets safer," says Daniel Leonard, associate dean at Chapman University's Lawrence and Kristina Dodge College of Film and Media Arts.

Opportunities for change comes infrequently, he says, "so the change needs to happen soon, to prevent this from ever happening again."

The shooting spotlights how crucial it is that on-set gunsmiths have experience. Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, the 24-year-old armorer, or weapons expert, on "Rust," is the daughter of a well-known movie set armorer, but there were signs her work on "Rust" was being questioned given reports that a firearm on the set had accidentally discharged before the incident, according to Associated Press reports.

Also up for debate is whether real weapons are still needed given today's special effects. Producers of one show, the ABC police drama "The Rookie," announced over the weekend that they would ban real guns from the set.

But equally relevant is the pressing question of crew working conditions, which were the focus of a recently averted strike against the producers union. Pay, work breaks, holidays and other



Late filmmaker Halyna Hutchins is shown at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival. SONIA RECCHIA/GETTY IMAGES

quality of life issues formed the bulk of the demands by crucial personnel who oversee everything from makeup to lighting.

"Working with guns is just one aspect of safety on sets," Chapman professor Leonard says. "There's sort of a get-it-done mentality on film sets that is steeped in long hours. People make bad decisions when they are tired."

On Saturday, California state Sen. Dave Cortese, a Democrat, called for a ban on live ammunition and guns that are capable of firing live ammunition from film and theater sets.

"There is an urgent need to address alarming work abuses and safety violations occurring on the set of theatrical productions, including unnecessary high-risk conditions such as the use of live firearms," said Cortese, chair of the California Senate's Labor Committee. "Our entertainment industry must do a better job of ensuring safe working conditions for our hardworking crews."

A looming subplot of the "Rust" tragedy is a reported walkout of about half a dozen camera crew members hours before the shooting, according to a Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office affidavit released Sunday. Director Souza told investigators the walkout caused a delay in the schedule but said everyone on the set was getting along, according to an affidavit that outlines the majority of what is public so far.

That characterization contrasts with Facebook posts by Lane Luper, a "Rust" camera operator and union member, who before the incident wrote that "producers on that movie are treating the local crew like (expletive)" and noted that 14-hour days were common.

Complicating matters are reports that assistant director Dave Halls, who had declared the gun safe before Baldwin took it, had faced complaints about on-set safety in earlier productions, according to the AP. Halls told investigators he was not aware the gun was loaded with a real bullet.

Halls had been fired from a film production after a gun incident injured a crew member, the movie's production company told CNN. He was an assistant director on "Freedom's Path" in 2019 when a gun "unexpectedly discharged" on the set, causing a sound crew member to recoil from the blast and halting production, the production company Rocket Soul Studios said Monday.

The sound crew member was evaluated by an on-set medic and advised to seek medical treatment. The crew member returned a few days later, Rocket Soul said. After the incident, Halls was removed from the set and fired from the production, the company said.

The "Rust" set is considered paused now, according to a producers' note to crew Sunday. The local district attorney plans to hold a news conference on the shooting Wednesday morning.

Whether shooting will ever resume is anyone's guess. On Friday, Baldwin released a statement on Twitter saying there were "no words to convey my shock and sadness regarding the tragic accident." He was photographed with Hutchins' husband and son at a New Mexico hotel after the accident but since then has remained out of sight.

On Monday, Baldwin's wife, Hilaria, posted on Instagram: "My heart is with Halyna. Her husband. Her son. Their family and loved ones. And my Alec."

"Rust" is the story of a 13-year-old boy who must care for himself and his younger brother after their parents are killed in 1880s Kansas. After the teen is accused of accidentally killing a rancher, he reconnects with his estranged grandfather, played by Baldwin, and goes on the run.

In mid-October, the New Mexico Film Office noted the production would employ about 330 locals, including 75 crew members, 22 actors and 230 people as background talent.

Not long into filming, "Rust" faced complaints by some crew members about long days, few breaks and lodging that was more than an hour away from the set. The eventual walkout of one camera crew probably only added to a sense of confusion on the set that could have contributed to lax oversight in the

moments leading up to the shooting.

Director Souza, who was struck by the bullet after it first hit his cinematographer, has provided the most complete explanation of what happened leading up to the 1:50 p.m. shooting inside a wooden church on the movie ranch.

Souza told detectives work resumed later than usual that day because producers had to bring in a new crew to replace the camera operators who had quit. Reports have indicated the new crew was not part of the production workers union.

Days earlier, Baldwin had posted an impassioned video on Facebook railing against the mistreatment of Hollywood crews by producers and urged them to strike if necessary.

According to the affidavit, Baldwin was sitting in a church pew rehearsing drawing his weapon "and pointing his revolver towards the camera lens."

Reid Russel, a "Rust" cameraman, told investigators that during the scene preparation, without video or audio being recorded, Baldwin tried to explain how "he was going to draw out the firearm and where his arm would be" after the gun was pulled from his holster.

In Friday's interview with a detective, Joel Cano, Souza said he was "concentrated on the monitors" and standing beside Hutchins, who was at the camera and not among those who quit the production. Souza was viewing the camera angle as crews prepared for the first scene to be shot after a lunch break. He then described a sound, "like a whip and then loud pop," and heard Hutchins "complaining about her stomach and grabbing her midsection."

Hutchins "began to stumble backwards and was assisted to the ground," Souza told police. Souza was bleeding from his own injury to the shoulder.

Souza told investigators that before Baldwin was handed the gun, assistant director Halls had described it as a "cold gun," an industry term for a weapon that does not contain ammunition. The director said there should "never be live rounds whatsoever near or around the film set." He said guns on the set were checked first by the film's armorer, Gutierrez-Reed, and checked again by Halls, who would hand the firearms to the actor using them.

After the lunch break, Souza told investigators, he was "not sure if the firearm was checked again."

Contributing: Elise Brisco, Cydney Henderson and Noel Lyn Smith of the Farmington (New Mexico) Daily Times

## BLUE ZONES PROJECT - SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

### Measuring Community Well-Being: The Results Are In

By Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida

Many of us have heard the expression that the "whole is greater than the sum of its parts." This is especially true when it comes to community health and well-being. There are multiple key factors that drive well-being that not only impact each individual, but also determines how much an entire community thrives. Ten years ago, Sharecare, parent company of Blue Zones Project, pioneered the concept of well-being, inspired by the WHO definition of health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity." This well-being concept is measured on 5 different constructs:

- Purpose - Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals
- Social - Having supportive relationships and love in your life
- Financial - Managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security
- Community - Liking where you live, feeling safe and having pride in your community
- Physical - Having good health and enough energy to get things done daily

Combined, these elements make up the Well-Being Index (WBI), and have been used to measure community well-being for more than a decade. Most recently, these measurements have been expanded to include Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). The SDOH measure Economic Security, Healthcare Access, Resource Access, Food Access, and Housing & Transportation. More than 600 data points are collected from these and examined by Boston University to help form valid and reliable predictors of well-being.

For the first time ever in Southwest Florida, SDOH and the WBI have been combined to measure well-being under a comprehensive assessment known as the Community Well-Being Index (CWBI). This in-depth measurement even provides real-time feedback.

Much like a car that requires a diagnostic instrument to be plugged in to measure how well it is running and isolate any problems, Sharecare and Blue Zones Project use the RealAge® test as a collection instrument to determine how well Southwest Florida measures in well-being, and uncovers opportunities for improvement. Taken by over 43 million people worldwide, the RealAge test determines how old a person really is based on stress levels, diet, activity, and sleep. Then, goals are set to lower or maintain that person's RealAge.

For Southwest Florida, RealAge data was collected in 2020-21 within seven community subsets (Bonita Springs, Estero, Naples, Golden Gate, East Naples, Immokalee, and Marco Island). Results show that Southwest Florida's latest overall well-being score—72.2 out of 100—compares favorably to the most recent state and national data, at 64.0 and 64.3.

In comparison data from 2015 (the year Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida began), results show many more people are thriving in Southwest Florida, and healthy behaviors are on the rise. Highlights include:

- Nearly 70 percent of respondents are exercising at least 30 minutes a day, 3 days a week, a rise of 11.7 percentage points since program launch.
- Tobacco use dropped by 5.2 percentage points, reaching an impressive low of 3.6 percent in 2021.
- A stronger sense of purpose is fueling well-being, with more people reporting they like what they do and that they learn or do something interesting every day.
- More residents are feeling recognized for helping improve the area where they live—a jump of 13 percentage points and a boost to community well-being.
- Naples, East Naples, and Golden Gate Estates saw statistically significant improvements in overall well-being and in two or more well-being elements. Physical well-being showed statistically significant improvements in Bonita Springs and Estero, and purpose well-being rose measurably on Marco Island.
- Research supports positive to no impact on lifestyle behaviors for most populations during the pandemic. Unexpected improvements in some health measures such as blood pressure may be affected by an absence of data due to people postponing healthcare visits during the pandemic.

While there have been great improvements in overall reduction of certain health risks in Southwest Florida, certain opportunities for improvement remain according to the CWBI data. Stress affected 78.6 percent of respondents in 2020-21; a lack of exercise with weights, 65.2 percent; inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption, 61.4 percent; and high Body Mass Index, 54.7 percent.

Also, 2015 - 2018 data on SDOH showed Southwest Florida scoring well above comparable communities on most measures but lagging the state on some aspects of healthcare and food access. Healthy food access within one mile is a challenge for 48.72 percent of the region's population and affects many demographic groups.

Community Well-Being Index

SDOH  
SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Ongoing action to support well-being through tangible, environmental changes will further improve these measures. Areas for continued focus include:

- Expanding access to healthy food
- Raising fruit and vegetable consumption
- Increasing active commuting: walking, biking, and the use of public transit

Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida continues to harness the power of "we" by working with over 760 organizations to include worksites, schools, restaurants, HOA's, faith-based organizations and other organizations. By continued collection and measurement of well-being data, Blue Zones Project and our many partners can continue to move the needle in a positive way and allow the determination of where resources are most needed. We invite individuals and organizations to use the RealAge tool by visiting [bzpsouthwestflorida.sharecare.com](https://bzpsouthwestflorida.sharecare.com).

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is part of Southwest Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information, visit [southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com](https://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).