



Fascist Flag Burning!! At TestSafe

Ben Cabot, Forensic Scientist, TestSafe Australia

It's not often that one gets the opportunity to burn flags in the name of work (and I don't think it will be a regular occurrence), but there I was on a mellow September afternoon transformed from a humble forensic scientist into **Benito Cabotta, fascisti** (see left). Out went the normal work attire and on went the full brown tweed suit, complete with wooden-soled shoes, fedora, and suspenders (yes, suspenders). I had become that anonymous fascist who was to provocatively burn the Union Jack and a Communist flags in Sydney's Domain back in 1921.



ABC TV History's show *"Rewind"* has been screening re-enactments of past historical events and has previously found TestSafe's facilities ideal for filming, particularly when some of the situations require use of fire and explosions. What the Directors wanted to achieve was to re-enact the ceremonial burning of a Communist flag by Fascists in 1921 in the Domain in Sydney as part of a segment on the growth of extreme right and left wing politics during the 1920's. Apparently some Communists had got together the week before and had burnt the Union Jack as part of a protest, so the Fascists thought they would respond in kind.

This re-enactment was originally scheduled to occur at the ABC studios at Gore Hill, but the prospect of naked flames and fire on the site caused a major OH&S row, which went on for two weeks and required resolution. Some people were concerned that the burning a flag in such a setting might endanger people's lives, so a decision was made to undertake the whole scene within a safe external environment and under controlled conditions at TestSafe. Once everyone found out WorkCover was involved the concerns ended immediately. The producers also recalled the fantastic experience they had previously in July when they came out to film a coal dust explosion for another episode.



ABC preparing to burn the flag, starring "Benito Cabotta"

On that occasion the whole event was made safe, easy and efficient by TestSafe staff.

With only a couple of days to find a suitable site, what was required included a large grassy area with foliage in the background (something TestSafe has PLENTY of) and someone willing to dress-up and burn the flag, namely me, as no-one else would do it.



The "re-enactment" being filmed



"Benito Cabotta" with the burnt flag

The afternoon of filming was a great time. The Fascist attire, typical of the formal clothing worn during the twenties, and probably still seen on the streets of Rome, made me quite hot, itchy and daggy to begin with, but I ended up feeling quite comfortable and even considered wearing it out on the town (only for a brief moment, mind you).

The experience also showed me the way in which filming is done, with a number of 'takes' made in no real sequence with the best ones being strung together to make the scene. I'd also never burnt a flag before which, although fun, in some countries might lead to arrest, and is something that not many other people can say they've ever done. Throwing kerosene and lit matches onto the flag, as well as stamping all over it while showing obvious anger were all part of the fun during the afternoon. We also catered for both sides of the political line by burning the Union Jack as well.

Unfortunately, I don't think this will lead to my big break with television and film, as I was assured my face won't even be shown on television, although it might lead to some lucrative hand modelling jobs! Special thanks must go to the Londonderry Air Editor, Debbie Wouters who was kind enough to stand there and constantly laugh at me while taking plenty of photographs.

Keep an eye out for our episode next year on "Rewind" on the ABC, 9:30pm Sundays.