# Managing the crowd

Although the majority of the crowd at an event is likely to comprise participants who come to observe and to peacefully enjoy whatever is happening, the presence of undesirable elements (such as predators in search of victims, and people with other psychological or social agendas) must also be considered. To manage the crowd effectively, a monitoring system must be put in place to ensure there is a constant watch on activities. It may be that a proactive type of management is also required, anticipating and resolving problems before they occur, rather than after. You are responsible for ensuring that this occurs.

Does your type of event predispose it to certain crowd issues which might negatively impact on participants? For example:

- rock concerts can create certain problems with youth abuse of alcohol and/or illicit drugs, and in some cases, even weapons

- religious / 'healing' events can attract an inordinate number of the ill or infirm or disabled, thus increasing the potential for on-site medical/health-related emergencies

- certain sports events can attract over-reactive supporters and hooligan acts

- events for senior citizens can often increase the number of medical crises at the events as opposed to a younger, healthier, section of the population.

Monitoring crowd behaviour is an essential aspect of any crowd management system. It advises you whether the systems you have in place are working. It also enables you to detect potential problems at an early stage, and to deal with them.

When thinking about monitoring requirements, you need to consider:

- how quickly crowding could develop to a dangerous level in various areas inside the venue

- how quickly you could respond to crowding problems (such as by preventing more people coming in, or by dispersing people from overcrowded areas)

- if a crowding incident occurred, how you would get to know about it, so that you could deal with the incident itself and prevent any escalation.

It will help you to answer 'yes' to the questions in the previous paragraph if you can position staff in the crowd so that they can:

- sense atmospheres, tensions and moods

- look out for signs of distress

- respond quickly to incidents and accidents

- quash any dangerous behaviour (such as jumping on seats, or climbing up scaffolding for a better view) quickly, before it spreads

- help people and deal with their queries

- discourage dangerous behaviour by their very presence.

When monitoring the distribution of people, the following are useful indices:

- space between people

- estimations of raw numbers of people (such as by making a rough count of people in a relatively small, identifiable area [such as an area bounded by four columns] which can be scaled up; roughly calculating the length times breadth of queues between identifiable sections [such as between fence posts] which can be scaled up; and the rate of flow into or out of an area [such as the number of people passing a marked object])

- behavioural changes (such as pushing, surging, shouting or similar indications of bad temper or excitement).

You may wish to decide at the planning stage how you are going to monitor the crowds. This could include:

- closed circuit television (CCTV): this might range from a few fixed cameras at one or two exits, to the use of a large number of remote-control cameras with zoom lenses (CCTV allows an overview of sections such as entrances, departure routes and problem areas to be relayed to a central control point)

- patrolling the venue: where crowding problems are likely to develop slowly at particular points within the venue, staff may be given specific areas to check at regular intervals

- watching crowds from a fixed point: this can be carried out as a specific task or, where manpower is short, at the same time as the performance of other duties (such as checking tickets); good vantage points are needed for this.

When you have decided on the methods to be used, think about the areas where crowds are likely to build up. Your organisation may wish to take into consideration how to deal with crowding problems, and your monitoring could be designed to trigger planned measures. Problem areas might include bottlenecks (such as stairs, escalators and bridge links between halls); areas where people queue (such as pay desks and ordering and information points); popular stalls, attractions or exhibits; and refreshment areas.

It is considered appropriate to ask yourself about the likelihood and consequences of any sudden crowd movements that could happen (such as invasions of the stage or pitch, mobbing of celebrities, and running between various vantage points). In each case, decide how best to monitor and control this sort of behaviour. This might involve:

- training staff to be on the lookout for certain types of behaviour

- laying down rules for visitors about what sort of behaviour is acceptable, and what is not

- penalties for unacceptable behaviour

- drawing up procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Some suggestions which you could consider implementing:

- identify supervisors and crowd controllers by the use of jackets, arm bands or badges, and expect them to be active and visible, to quickly identify problems and discourage those causing them

- expect and encourage management personnel, supervisors and security people to avoid becoming too involved in watching the event and to be observant, active and consistent in applying rules and procedures.