Managing the crowd

When crowds of people gather, there is always the possibility of unsafe behaviour. Most people come to an event to enjoy it peacefully, but some may not. The event may draw undesirable elements (such as predators in search of victims, and other people with antisocial intentions); and otherwise-peaceful people may act uncharacteristically when in a crowd. Even the peaceful movement of large numbers of people can create health and safety risks.

Planning to monitor the crowd

To effectively monitor and manage the crowd, you need to take a systematic, planned and proactive approach, anticipating and resolving problems before they occur.

☐ **Identify the key risks for the event**

Different types of events are susceptible to different risks. For example:

- at rock concerts, problems can arise with abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs, and with some attendees having weapons
- religious, spiritual and healing-type events can attract a higher proportion of ill, infirm or disabled people, which increases the possibility of on-site medical issues and emergencies
- some sports events can attract overreactive supporters; and hooliganism might be a risk
- at events for senior citizens, there can be more on-site medical issues and emergencies than at events for younger people.

Two common risks with large crowds are build-ups of people in confined areas, and sudden movements of people. Both risks can result in discomfort, panic, injury and even death. You should identify the likelihood and consequences of sudden crowd movements (such as invasions of the stage or pitch, mobbing of celebrities, and running between various vantage points) when assessing event risks.

☐ **Consider the extent of monitoring needed**

The extent of monitoring needed depends on the size of the crowd and the main risks. When planning to monitor the crowd, 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)
- how quickly you need to know about incidents, to deal effectively with them and prevent them escalating.

The greater the risks, and the more severe the consequences, the more monitoring you need. This is so you can quickly identify issues and allocate resources to address them.

☐ **Identify monitoring methods**

Crowd monitoring methods include:

- closed-circuit television (CCTV): CCTV enables operators at a central control point to monitor entrances, exits, traffic routes and problem areas, using from a few fixed cameras at one or two exits to many remote-control cameras with zoom lenses
- patrols: where crowding problems are likely to develop slowly at particular places inside or outside the venue, allocate staff to regularly check these places
- staff located at vantage points: staff can be allocated specifically to watch the crowd from vantage points; if staff are unavailable to do this, they can also watch the crowd when performing other duties (such as checking tickets).

☐ **Identify monitoring locations**

At the least, monitor places where crowds are likely to build up, including:

- bottlenecks (such as stairs, escalators, passageways and bridges between parts of the venue)
- areas where people queue (such as pay desks and ordering and information points)
- popular stalls, attractions and exhibits
- refreshment areas.

☐ **Develop monitoring procedures**

Monitoring procedures might:

- define potentially dangerous and unacceptable behaviour
- cover how to deal with, and penalties for, unacceptable behaviour
- cover how staff identify key risks and unacceptable behaviour, and how they implement procedures for dealing with risks and unacceptable behaviour
- require supervisors and security staff to wear jackets, arm bands or badges
- require supervisors and security staff to watch the crowd and not the event, quickly identify problems, manage people engaging in unacceptable behaviour and actively and consistently follow procedures.

Monitoring the crowd

Monitoring crowd behaviour is an essential aspect of crowd management. Effective monitoring shows if plans and procedures are working, and enables staff to detect and deal with potential problems at an early stage.

☐ **Position staff**

To monitor a crowd effectively, position staff in the crowd so they can:

- sense atmospheres, tensions and moods
- look out for signs of distress
- watch out for, and respond quickly to, incidents and accidents that are developing or happening
- quickly stop any dangerous behaviour (such as jumping on seats, or climbing up scaffolding for a better view), before it spreads

- help people and deal with their queries
- have a visible presence, to discourage unacceptable behaviour.

❑ Monitor the distribution of attendees

To monitor the distribution of people at the event:

- monitor the space between people
- make rough, limited-area estimates (which you can scale up for the whole crowd) of numbers of people, for example by:
    - roughly counting people in a small, identifiable area (such as an area bounded by four columns)
    - roughly calculating the length and breadth of queues between identifiable sections (such as between fence posts)
    - estimating the rate of flow into or out of an area (such as the number of people passing a marked object)
- watch for changes in crowd behaviour (such as pushing, surging or shouting; or other signs of bad temper or excitement).