

Managing the crowd

Although most people come to an event to peacefully enjoy it, you need to address the possibility that the event might also draw undesirable elements (such as predators in search of victims, and people with psychological or antisocial issues). To manage the crowd effectively and to maintain a constant watch on activities, you need a monitoring system. You also need to manage the crowd proactively, anticipating and resolving problems before they occur.

Does your type of event make it susceptible to factors which might negatively impact on participants? For example:

- at rock concerts, problems can arise with youth abuse of alcohol and/or illicit drugs, and with some participants having weapons
- religious / 'healing' events can attract a higher proportion of ill, infirm or disabled people, which increases the possibility of on-site medical issues and emergencies
- certain sports events can attract overreactive supporters and hooliganism is a possibility
- there can be more on-site medical issues and emergencies at events for senior citizens, compared with events for younger people.

Monitoring crowd behaviour is an essential aspect of any crowd management system. Effective monitoring shows you if your systems are working, and enables you to detect and deal with potential problems at an early stage.

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 it and prevent it escalating.

To monitor a crowd effectively, you should 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
- quickly quash 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 dangerous behaviour.

To monitor the distribution of people, you can:

- monitor the space between people
- make limited area and rough estimates (which you can scale up for the whole crowd) of numbers of people, for example by:
 - roughly counting people in a relatively 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, 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 crowd. This could include:

- closed circuit television (CCTV): ranging from a few fixed cameras at one or two exits, to a large number of remote-control cameras with zoom lenses (CCTV enables operators at a central control point to monitor entrances, departure routes and problem areas)
- patrolling the venue: where crowding problems are likely to develop slowly at particular points within the venue, you should allocate staff to check specific areas at regular intervals
- watching crowds from good vantage points: staff can have this as a specific task or, where manpower is short, do it at the same time as performing other duties (such as checking tickets).

After you decide on monitoring methods, you should identify areas where crowds are likely to build up. These 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.

You should identify the likelihood and consequences of possible sudden crowd movements (such as invasions of the stage or pitch, mobbing of celebrities, and running between various vantage points). For each, plan to monitor and control the behaviour that might cause the sudden movement. 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
- drawing up penalties for, and procedures for dealing with, unacceptable behaviour
- equipping supervisors and security personnel with jackets, arm bands or badges
- expecting supervisors and security personnel to be visible, to not watch the event but to watch the crowd, to quickly identify problems, to discourage people engaging in unacceptable behaviour and to actively and consistently apply the rules and procedures.