

Crowd and spectator safety

Crowd and spectator management can be stressful and time-consuming. A seemingly docile crowd can quickly veer into chaos, sparked by a single incident. You need to make sure your organisation and facilities are prepared to handle it. Because crowds can be so volatile, they require careful management.

As an event organiser, this management falls on your shoulders. Whatever event you have planned—whether it is a sporting event, music concert or fair—you have a legal obligation to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety of visiting crowds. Depending on the size of your event, you can delegate some aspects of crowd safety to employees or contractors, but, as the organiser, overall responsibility for ensuring public safety rests with you.

Planning for an Event

Managing crowd and spectator safety should start long before the actual event. The earlier you plan, the more hazards you can identify and minimise. Do not complete general event planning and only afterwards consider crowd and spectator safety management—plan them in tandem.

“Treat crowd and spectator safety with the same amount of importance as your other top-priority business aims, since an unsafe event could be financially disastrous.”



Even before choosing a venue for your event, you should be thinking about crowd safety. In your preliminary event planning stages, consider the following factors to help you choose the safest, most appropriate venue:

Expected turnout – Forecast your expected turnout by looking at factors such as advance ticket sales, attendance on previous occasions and the proposed level of publicity. Always be ready to accommodate more people than you anticipate.

Type of visitors – Consider your spectators' likely demographic when making planning decisions. For example, will your crowd be mostly elderly people, who may need special accommodations?

Getting to and from the venue – Examine the transport infrastructure in the area near the proposed venue, and determine whether it can handle the expected number of spectators.

Venue suitability – Note the venue's maximum capacity and use that as a baseline to determine whether the venue can accommodate your event. Are there enough entrances, exits, toilets and first-aid facilities?

Excess spectators – Avoid a disaster by devising a procedure to deal with an overcrowded venue. Do not get caught off guard by a larger-than-expected and possibly anxious crowd.

Previous information collected – Capitalise on the knowledge of previous events by learning from past incidents. For example, ensure extra security for an event that has been especially unruly.

Assessing Your Event's Risk

Once you choose a venue, carefully examine what your event aims to accomplish and identify any possible associated hazards that could harm your employees, volunteers, spectators or members of the public.

You are required by UK law to undertake a risk assessment that evaluates what precautions you need to implement to prevent harm. The Health and Safety Executive provides detailed information on how to conduct a risk assessment, which you can find at www.hse.gov.uk.

Organising the hazards you find in your risk assessment into the following categories may help you keep track of them and uncover new ones:

Anticipated demographic – Who will be attending and how are they likely to behave?

Venue suitability – Is the venue adequate for ensuring the safety of your attendees?

Managerial arrangements – Are employee arrangements suitable for managing crowds? For example, are managerial roles and responsibilities clear, and are good command and communication structures in place?

Presence of hazardous items and substances – Do your employees and volunteers know how to use and store items or substances which could pose a hazard to the crowd?

Emergency procedures – Have you considered how your event could be disrupted, what new hazards could arise as a result of disruption and what to do in case of an emergency?

Crowd Hazards

The crowd hazards event organisers face are too numerous to list here in full. Instead, consider this small sample of crowd-specific hazards to start assessing potential hazards at your event:

- Crushing between people
- Crushing against fixed structures, such as barriers
- Trampling underfoot
- Surging, swaying or rushing
- Aggressive behaviour, particularly between groups of rival supporters
- Dangerous behaviour, such as climbing on equipment, running down steep slopes or throwing objects
- People getting trapped, such as wheelchair users in a large crowd
- Intoxicated, unruly spectators

Venue Hazards

- Slipping or tripping due to inadequately lit areas or poorly maintained floors
- Moving vehicles sharing the same route as pedestrians
- Structural collapse, such as a fence or barrier falling
- Objects that obstruct movement and cause congestion
- Failure of equipment such as turnstiles
- Poorly planned queues that obstruct crowd movement and generate crossflows as people cut through the crowd to reach other areas

Early Planning Is Successful Planning

Start planning crowd and spectator safety as soon as possible to ensure your event is successful. For further information please do not hesitate to contact us.

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