

Before The Event Ends In Chaos!!

Greg Hayes- Partner TaskForce Strategies

When walking into any venue for food, entertainment, etc. what is the last thing on most peoples minds? Is there an emergency plan that has been practiced with adequate resources? Unfortunately, many venues lack solid emergency response planning for a variety of natural and man made incidents. There are a number of barriers to overcome to ensure the venue has adequate planning in place. The most notable is specifically the costs associated to public safety planning and response. What this leads to in the end is increased risk for the venue. Post emergency incident, the lawyers come to town, now the finger pointing begins to pass the blame for an inadequate planning and response. However, if we breakdown the elements of what is required, we can show the return on investment for some up front emergency preparedness work helping reduce the risk profile for the venue. First let's look at the who's who in the zoo for these events.

Who's who in the zoo

There are a number of key individuals to define within a given venue and it is important to know their motivation.

- 1) **Venue owner**- The individual or investment group who owns the venue space. The benefit to them is increased foot traffic and marketing their space for future revenue. The venue owner will receive monies for the use of the venue from the promoter.
- 2) **Promoter**- The individual or agency who is planning as well as scheduling all of the operational aspects of the event. They work with other vendors, suppliers as well as artist management. Their motivation is profitability.
- 3) **Sponsors**- The sponsors will work with the promoter and support the event with funding or other in-kind support to have their name promoted throughout the venue.
- 4) **Artist management (ie. "the tour")**- There will be 2 important individuals to know about, the tour manager and the production manager. The tour manager handles the artist, band and support staff. The production manager handles the stage as well as all of the other assorted components to the show it's self. The tour's motivation is to meet the contractual obligations for full payment OR ensure all contractual clauses are met by the promoter as full payment might be possible without stepping on stage.
- 5) **Local agency/ groups**- In some cases they might be a local group hosting the event such as Rotary or civi organization who are the local points of contact. The local agency/ groups want to have fun and grow the event for the future.
- 6) **The attendees**- The attendees pay to enter the venue, purchase food, beverage and goods from the vendors. Their motivation is to have fun and walk away feeling that they have gotten their moneys worth from the event.

Depending on the complexity of the event, a few additional parties might be involved. Overall, for the majority of the individuals involved, the motivation is money. No matter what anyone might say, it's always about money. The promoter will sometimes say "*I never make money on these events, can you donate your service*". That's a trap for public safety to fall in. They make money, you just need to understand "where" the money is made so here is how it works.

The artist costs are covered under the ticket price. As an example, you can go to the internet and search out the price for a given artist. Jason Aldean is \$750,000 where as Sammy Hagar is \$150,000¹ for a single 90 minute show. The artist management will also negotiate other items through what's called a "artist rider" which can specify what the promoter must supply. One of the most notable is Van Halen's bowl of M&M's will all of the brown ones removed². Within the rider the artist will be allowed to sell merchandise or "merch" to help drive up their profitability.

Important to note, what is being identified in artist riders now are public safety resources such as security, law enforcement, fire and EMS. Also, some riders are requiring a command post with all public safety agencies represented. Simplified, if the promoter or public safety does not meet the rider requirements, it's a breach of contract with full payment and the artist may not take the stage.

From there, the promoters are hedging a bet that the attendees are going to hit the food and beverage vendors aggressively. Especially the beverage vendor as the profit margins are greater. They will negotiate a low cost for the beverages and charge an above market price. How do they get away with it? You can't bring beverages into the venue and once you are in your are locked in. The profitability within the beverage service can be very lucrative for the promoter. When you look at some venues, they use the entertainment to draw in visitors with the hopes they utilize some of their other services such as hotel, restaurants and of course, the card club or casino.

Threats

Every part of our daily lives have "threats" which could cause us to respond to an emergency issue. Threats are constantly changing on the type of activities we are conducting and where we are located.

When we look at events of all sizes, the threats are somewhat similar and can be categorized into a short list of the most critical ones to address;

- 1) Severe Weather
- 2) Medical Emergencies- Heat & intoxication
- 3) Human Factors- Crowds & Assaults
- 4) Act of Violence
- 5) Fires- Venue type and pyrotechnics use

All of these threats need to be addressed in a tactical plan which identify key trigger points for decisions for immediate action to be take to minimize the impact or stop the threat. Some of the threats are easier to control than others. Examples are, severe weather vs fires. Severe weather is uncontrollable. We need to closely monitor and have a built in reaction time to keep the public safe. Fires can be easier to lower the risk with inspections of vendors and pyrotechnics if utilized. The goal in the fire risk category is to ensure that all operations which could be an ignition source is in compliance with the manufacturers specifications for use as well as national codes.

Tactical planning

¹ Event Resources Presents- http://www.eventresourcespresents.com/artist_search

² There's a brilliant reason why Van Halen asked for a bowl of M&Ms with all the brown candies removed before every show, [insider-https://www.insider.com/van-halen-brown-m-ms-contract-2016-9](https://www.insider.com/van-halen-brown-m-ms-contract-2016-9)

Tactical planning seems like a daunting task when in fact focusing on the basics of response can go along way to helping lowering the chaos during the response. Simple tactical planning includes having a plan for ingress as well as egress for emergency personnel. Identifying emergency egress points for the attendees with a pre-scripted message if an evacuation is needed. A simple pre event walkthrough discussing response elements addressing all of the threats and then communicating the plan to response staff. Of course, if you scribe out an Incident Action Plan, that is the industry standard. However, if you use a cocktail napkin representing your plan, that is better than nothing at all so start there.

Unified Command

One of the greatest challenges to the operation is to truly form a Unified Incident Command contained within an Incident Command Post (ICP). This is a critical component for response success. A number of disaster after actions have pointed directly to the lack of an on-site ICP with representation of Law Enforcement, Fire, EMS as well as the venue owner/ promoter. Trying to get all of the parties contained within the ICP can be a huge challenge. First of all, egos get in the way. Agency heads may not have a positive working relationships and feel that they don't need their counterpart in the ICP. This is false. All of the public safety agencies have a stake in the event and need representation in the ICP.

Beyond the agency ego's, promoter must have representation in the command structure and ICP. They might not be in the ICP, but are a phone call away to be a part of critical decisions. Finally, a decision making plan or matrix will go along way to help make the critical decisions during the crisis. Involving the promoter will go along way in building that positive relationship. For example, monitoring weather conditions in the ICP and feeding the information to the promoter so they can make a decision on event postponement OR cancelation puts the decision on their back.

Resources

The promoter should be paying the staffing costs for the necessary public safety coverage from all disciplines. Of course this cuts into the profits of the promoter so they will attempt to dictate your resources. Don't let the Promoter dictate the Public Safety response needed for the event. You know your service, the area and available resources. If we can have some resources at the event to take care of the day-to-day issues such as medicals and monitoring weather, it will be worth every penny once the incident escalates beyond the control of the on-site resources.

Show day

On show day, have a briefing with the on-site resources and monitor all threats which could affect the event. An ICP is really an intel center for information. Using technology such as cameras, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) streams looking at crowd movement as well as congestion, internet resources for weather monitoring, news and finally social media monitoring. All seems complex, but this is where we can engage our Emergency Managers to help support the ICP with some Situation Unit Leader works as well as logistical support with a connection to dispatch. The hope is that you get to sit back and watch the entire show go on and any incident is small and mitigated immediately.

The blame game when things don't go right

So when things don't go as planned it is important to know that this is when the blame game starts. Everyone goes running for cover when the questions start firing off from media, sponsors and the politicians in response to an emergency that took place at the event. The promoter will blame public safety agencies and vice versa. A few of those other individuals/groups will also work to transfer responsibility. What is most likely at issue, lack of a tactical response plan and enough public safety resources which resulted in business loss (profitability), injuries and deaths. This can almost always be linked back to cost. Public Safety operations at event cost money period!! Adequate public safety assets need to be in place based on the threat assessment. We should not "comp" our services when the promoter offers an in-kind trade of free concert tickets, etc. for our services claiming they "*always loose money on these events*". Ask yourself this, if the promoter always loses money, then why are they driving a \$100,000 vehicle?

The blame game will get nasty when the lawyers get involved working feverishly on behalf of their client to transfer responsibility to another party who was involved in the event. Why?? The law suits which arise. In the case of the October 1, 2017 Las Vegas Harvest Festival shooting the settlement was \$800 million³. In fact the lawyers were circling looking for clients only a day or two after the shooting took place with articles in major newspapers looking for victims. Who paid the \$800 million? The property owner, MGM⁴. In the end, all of the agencies/ individuals involved in the production of the event are on the hook at some level which has a monetary impact as well as a damaged reputation.

Behind the curtain

Behind the curtain of all of this is a group which we never think of, the insurance company who insured the event on behalf of the venue owner, promoter, sponsors and civic organizations. Every event will have an insurance policy behind it. The insurance policy is designed to protect those listed in the policy. The insurer will look at risk for the event and set the premium based on their own risk assessment.

This is really important to know as we can leverage this to help our public safety operations. How? When the event is being planned, ask if the event is insured and who is the agent? Bring them into a meeting with all of the parties listed on the policy. Ask one simple question to the insurance agent, "what are your expectations for public safety coverage at the event"? Most likely, how the insurance underwriters assessed the risk level was based on having an adequate public safety coverage from all agencies. This will clearly put all of the parties who are producing the event on notice that they are not meeting the insurance policy expectations. If they don't meet the policy requirement, then they are in default of policy requirements. The insurance company may, increase the premium, pull the policy OR not pay if claims should arise. This is a complex arena and the example above is simplified. Long story short, work directly with the insurance provider as they can be a great asset to help you get the proper coverage at the event.

³ *Judge approves \$800M settlement for Route 91 victims*, Las Vegas Review-Journal, <https://www.reviewjournal.com/crime/courts/judge-approves-800m-settlement-for-route-91-victims-2133490/>

⁴ *MGM says it will pay up to \$800 million to victims of Las Vegas massacre in settlement*, Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/mgm-says-it-will-pay-up-to-800-million-to-victims-of-las-vegas-massacre-in-settlement/2019/10/03/b57d021c-e5f6-11e9-a6e8-8759c5c7f608_story.html

Conclusion

There are small, medium to large venues throughout our jurisdictions. All have risk associated with them. The small ones are easy to manage with some simple communications, inspections and pre-planning with the venue. The large ones, especially the outdoor large venues are more complex and will require more planning and response assets onsite. Work to develop a positive working relationship with the venue owner, promoter and civic organizations so you can ensure your a providing the proper level of service AND are reimbursed for your agencies resources. Good Luck!!