

IMPLEMENTING SECURITY PLANS AT YOUR FESTIVAL



By Mary Margaret Satterfield

Event planners are constantly being reminded during conferences, webinars, and peer-to-peer networking opportunities the importance of a written security or emergency plan. Bottom line - everyone should have one. Whether the plan is simple and defers to local emergency personnel or it is complex with several community agencies assisting, a written plan is essential to the success and overall safety of the festival and event management industry.

Written plans usually include a variety of working pieces, however, below are a few common practice documents:

- Emergency contact sheet

- Declaration of who has overall command during an emergency or crisis
- A crisis communication plan for the public, volunteers and media
- Incident procedures for various types of emergencies.

Inclement Weather Plan

A written security plan is just that – a written security plan – if it is not followed as you have outlined. If something went horribly wrong would your event team be prepared to react? We all hope so, but there are several ways that the event leader can ensure the festival and those who are associated with the festival are prepared. One way is to im-

plement a version of the government's Incident Command System (ICS) and adapt it to meet the festival's needs. Three years ago, the Toad Suck Daze festival in Conway, Arkansas adopted this procedure which has proven to be the best plan the leadership could have ever put into place.

ICS is a standardized, on-scene approach that allows for the integration of personnel, communication and procedures operating throughout the festival. Responses are coordinated with various jurisdictions and agencies that establish a common process for planning. ICS has been developed to enable managers the opportunity to identify

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key concerns without losing focus on other components of the system. This system represents organizational best practices. Best of all, ICS is flexible. It can be molded and changed to fit the specific needs of any festival or incident. Regardless of the size of the event, personnel from a variety of agencies or areas can rapidly assimilate into a common management system that provides support to operational staff.

ICS is typically structured to facilitate activities in five major areas: Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance. Each of these areas are led by an Incident Management Team (IMT). This is a comprehensive team that assists ongoing needs throughout the event and has the capability of transitioning to a management function in the event of an emergency. IMT is comprised of a commander, general staff members and support personnel. Key members of your event team as well as community leaders and security staff should be organized into the overall structure. Once in place the IMT is responsible for the event and the response to all incidents during the entirety of the event. As a part of this, each member has a pre-designated role within the IMT that coincides with one of the five major ICS areas.

The Toad Suck Daze festival has structured a system where the Chamber CEO is the Incident Commander. The Festival Chairman and Festival Director are co-operations. The Festival Co-Chairman and Chamber Executive Vice President are co-logistics. The Festival Treasurer and Chamber CFO are co-finance and Festival Secretary and Chamber Vice President are co-planning. The county emergency manager acts as security.

Once the management team is in place, the festival should be broken down into the five components previously mentioned. This can be done by area, subcommittee, or as it will best fit your festival. Breakup the festival into smaller groups, affording each person on the IMT between three and five people that they are responsible for disseminating information and only one that they need to take information back up to. As information flows down the ICS chain, this will repeat throughout the festival.

Below is a chart of how that flow works for the Toad Suck Daze festival.

While the ICS is designed for emergency procedures keeping the IMT involved during the entire event is critical for the festival's success of fast mobilization. To ensure both the ICS and IMT are mutually compatible, set meetings during the event. The necessity of planning meetings leading up to an event are critical, but by continuing planning meetings once or twice a day during the event, the entire team remains aware of developing situations and possible future problems. Next, to keep your IMT involved, make sure the command center is constantly operating. It is important that the command center is not on the actual festival grounds, but is slightly off or on the edge of the location. This will give the command the opportunity to view the festival from the outside. Having at least two to three people that can make decisions and be able to call the entire IMT team back together in a moment's notice helps to ensure the process runs efficiently.

The next step you should consider is educating all committee members and volunteers as to their part in the plan. These volunteers should know who they report to and who they will get instructions from. This helps alleviate confusion in the case of an emergency. Training is an optimal way to educate, but you can also reinforce the plan on their event badges or paperwork they keep. For those with a larger role in the ICS, more training is involved, especially the first year a program is implemented. Not only should your volunteers be educated make sure your local city services know the system. This collaboration aids in response time and emergency preparedness.

Lastly, make sure your written security plan follows the ICS structure. The Columbus Arts Festival's written security plan outlines the specifics of their Emergency Services Team, which is very similar to the IMT. By including this in their written plan, it insures that this structure will continue and provide the correct emergency action to all situations that may arise.

In 2010, the Toad Suck Daze festival learned just how important a security plan and ICS really was. When it was

made clear that inclement weather in the form of severe storms and tornadoes would develop, the IMT and key city emergency personnel enacted the emergency plan. In just 30 minutes, IMT was able to quickly and efficiently do the following: close all ticket, volunteer, and drink booths; inform over 200 vendors to securely shutdown; close all attractions and amusements; inform the attendees via loud speaker of incoming weather and areas of shelter; and secure three additional severe weather locations for overflow. Because of ICS, which Toad Suck Daze had put in place just a year earlier, the festival was shut down and the estimated 75,000 attendees that were onsite at that time, had either enough time to leave or find shelter. There were no reported injuries or loss of attendees. After the inclement weather passed, the same procedure was used to re-open the festival for the remainder of the evening, in under fifteen minutes.

It became clear 3 years ago what all the fuss centering around building a security plan really was. Luckily the Toad Suck Daze festival and its leadership were prepared. By implementing the ICS structure into the festival, Toad Suck Daze has been able to streamline its response to emergency and non-emergency situations. Ensuring that you have a great security plan in place is important to event management, but making sure your written plan can be implemented is critical. Building an Incident Command System, or similar version, and implementing it into your festival procedure is an easy and efficient way to do this.

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