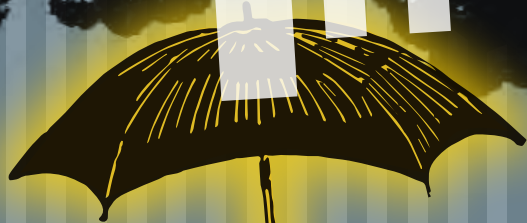


SUMMER WEATHER



Can You Handle the Pressure?



By Wayne Mahar

Over the past 18 months, I've written two articles for IFEA, spoken at the IFEA and FEO conventions, provided many large events site specific forecasting, and even met with top officials of New York City, all in an effort to make outdoor events better prepared for severe summer weather. What I found is many outdoor event organizers and cities "think" they are prepared for severe weather, but really aren't. When storms moved in, many couldn't handle the pressure.

The Indiana State Fair, Ottawa Bluesfest, Whitby, Ontario Ribfest and Pukkelpop Concert in Belgium... each got hit with severe weather over the past two years, some with deadly results. It doesn't happen often, but it does happen, and if it happens at your event, from a safety and liability standpoint, you want to be sure you are ready.

Admittedly, there will be times when there was just nothing you could do. More often however, more could have been done, the event could have been better prepared. Key severe weather safety elements were either ignored, forgotten or were never even discussed.

With prime summer fair, festival and concert season fast approaching, I thought this would be a good time to review severe weather safety for your event.

#1. WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

First and foremost, you need a Severe Weather Plan. A proper severe weather safety plan should begin with long range planning, meeting weeks and even months in advance with all key people and discussing all possible severe weather scenarios. This includes everything from different types of "weather events" to short and long "lead times" for sending people home or sending them to predetermined locations.

#2. KEY PEOPLE

Who are your "key people"? Law enforcement and security; Emergency Medical; your Public Relations personnel; your managers; the "Voice of your event"; the Announcer who is in constant contact with your guests; and your front office personnel. I can imagine for some of these folks, you are saying to yourself "Why would I have them at the meeting?" The answer will become clear later.

#3. PLAN OF ACTION

You will want to discuss types of severe weather and decide what your "Plan of Action" is for each. There should be a difference in your planning between what to do when a tornado threatens vs. simple heavy rains causing localized flooding of the grounds. Decide which "types" of weather will require people moving, and by people I mean everyone from patrons to vendors. If the weather is that bad,

where do you direct them to go? Designate buildings and shelters ahead of time.

#4. THE WEATHER

Deciding on types of severe weather and contingency plans is generally the easy part. Now it gets tougher. For instance, WHERE are you getting your weather information from? WHO is responsible for monitoring all the latest weather, storm movements, watches and warnings? Did you hire your own private meteorologist to work just for you and your event, someone you can call 24/7 with questions and concerns, even just to call and say "I'm a little concerned, the sky seems to be getting dark to our west." A private weather company you hire works for YOU and is concerned about YOU and YOUR event. Government weather services might, or might not be available to help you out when you call them. That's not their job, they don't have a commitment to you, or a stake in your event.

Whoever is in charge of monitoring weather, are they constantly monitoring for sudden changes, or just occasionally?

Assuming these issues are set, lets now deal with the potential for "increased danger!" What I'm talking about is actual severe weather approaching or hitting your venue at the same time you have 15,000 people watching your afternoon or evening concert at the grandstand. A ton of rowdy concert goers packed like sardines into the concert area and a severe thunderstorm warning or even tornado warning is issued for your area. Think Indiana State Fair, or more recently, last summer, the Rogers Sarnia Bayfest in Sarnia, Ontario Canada.

Precision Weather Service monitored Doppler Radar and was on the phone continuously with the Festival Director tracking the severe storm movement minute-by-minute, which by the way came within five miles of the venue.

#5. KEY PERSON

BEWARE! Do not mistake this for #2. WHO is THE key person at your event? Who is THE decision maker? In fast breaking weather with large crowds, you don't have time to find your managers, call a meeting and vote on what to do. You MUST have someone, in the know with the latest information who can make critical decisions *right now*. More so, all your key people, from Law Enforcement to the main office must know this individual as THE key decision maker so there are no questions or second guessing taking place in the midst of severe weather warnings. Many fairs, festivals and concerts do not have ONE key person in place, and this can be a real issue!

Take the Indiana State Fair. Seven lives were lost, and even to this day the argument continues between Fair officials,

Law Enforcement and the band itself, Sugarland, as to WHO had final say on "calling the concert." Nobody made the call before the severe weather hit and after the fact, everyone points fingers at the other. Designate THE key person well ahead of time and make sure everyone knows who it is, and that key individual MUST have direct and immediate access to the latest information to make these key decisions.

When signing contracts with the bands, promoters, private security, vendors or anybody on your grounds, make sure they know ahead of time WHO the real KEY decision maker is if push comes to shove.

#6. KEEP THE MAIN OFFICE INFORMED!

If bad weather develops miles away, chances are fair officials and concert goers will hear about it. It will begin with a watch being issued, meaning the chance of severe weather, then could be upgraded to a warning, meaning severe weather is likely. Maybe there has already been damage an hour west of you. As patrons, vendors and even the bands themselves hear of this, they begin wondering and want to know more, and in most instances, they call your main office. *Keep your office personnel in the know*. Everyone from vendors to the band should be clear and reminded when they check in that any emergency decisions of any type come through your main office, possibly coordinated with Law Enforcement! If you have one or two key office personnel to field inquiries, all the better!

#7. SPREADING THE WORD

If and when the time comes and a critical decision is made to move fair goers, vendors and workers, how do you spread the word? For your managers, your handful of key people, cell phone is typically the quickest. For most everyone else, this is where your Public Address Announcer becomes very important and the reason they should have been in on your initial severe weather plan meetings. They can help spread the word in an informed and clear way if THEY already understand the procedures. Let them help you and help everyone with clear and concise information over the loud speakers.

#8. EMERGENCY PERSONNEL

Make sure you, your managers, Law Enforcement/Security on the grounds and main office all have cell phone and/or two way radio contact with Emergency personnel. If there is a medical emergency, in severe weather or not, chances are it will come through Security or the Main Office.

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#9. CELL PHONES

In emergency times, everyone is on their cell phones, and normal cell phone signals could be an issue. If possible, try switching your cell phone(s) to analog. You may well find that old method less crowded.

#10. AFTER THE STORM

The storm is over. Hopefully you have no serious injuries. Your safety concerns may not be done yet. While you, remaining patrons and workers begin touring the grounds, watch for hazards, especially downed power lines or power cables running through water. Keep an eye out for building material and even furniture that may have been torn apart, nails showing, and thrown around the grounds.

There are countless other rules and things to watch out for. These ten are just a start, but an important start in being able to "handle the pressure" for severe weather at your outdoor event.

Wayne Mahar and Precision Weather Service is the leader in specialized weather services, Storm Alerts and storm preparation consulting for all types of events and high profile weddings. Clients include the New York State Fair, Oklahoma City Heart Walk, Boots and Hearts Country Music Festival, Academy Awards, Grammy's, Golden Globes, NEON Carnival at Coachella, Cannes Film Festival, Justin Beiber & Katy Perry movie premieres, NBA All Star Game, MTV, AHL Outdoor hockey game, Madonna and Kardashians' Holiday parties, large gatherings on the National Mall in Washington, hundreds of movie premieres through DREAMWORKS/Paramount, NBC-Universal, Warner Brothers, BestEvents LA, ELS Lights, FOX, Disney, CynFull Productions, Relativity Media, Silver Birches, Sharon Sacks and Yifat Oren & Associates.

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