

SPECIAL EVENTS  
MANAGEMENT  
EVENT  
CONTINGENCY  
PRE-PLANNING,

By failing to  
prepare, you are  
preparing to fail...

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1706-1790



WHAT'S  
YOUR  
PLAN?

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The goal of event contingency planning is to protect life and property by identifying the risk associated with an event and developing a plan of action to minimize these risks. The event organizer has to consider the impacts to a community, the resources it takes to mitigate potential risk associated with an event. The special event permit granting approval to host an event requires event organizers to take the necessary steps to reduce the impact in the community, its resources, and address the safety requirements of the participants and spectators. A few questions event organizers must ask are:

- What is a special event contingency plan?
- Why do I need a plan?
- What are the components to consider in the plan?
- Who should be on the team to help address risks and hazards associated with an event?

From the onset of planning an event, the event organizer will need to take into consideration the scope of the event, the potential risks of injury or illness to participants and spectators, security needs, and the emergency support required to help promote a safe and enjoyable event.

Throughout the United States, at any given time of year, there are festivals, concerts, parades, sporting events, and many other large and small events all having the potential to attract large crowds. Historically, certain types of events have an inherent capacity for special event management problems. Normally, such events take place with little or no problems, however, should a natural or man-made emergency or disaster occur, the event organizer is legally and morally obligated to ensure that the necessary and appropriate actions will be taken to minimize harm. When events occur, event planners must be a liaison between emergency service personnel, appropriate security services and health personnel to ensure that they address health, safety and security issues for the event.

Planning for an event is difficult. Planning for the potential risks and hazards associated with an event is even more difficult but essential to the event's success. If you want those who attend an event to have positive memories of it, you need to keep several things in mind. In the very early stages of planning, address the potential risks or even when you are discussing, promoting or sponsoring an event, address the many issues you must consider to mitigate potential problems associated with your event. Before you schedule the event, you should consider the scope of the event, the risks to spectators and participants, community impact,

and the emergency support required (personnel and logistics). You should also identify the lead agency and members of the local special event planning team to meet and review your event thoroughly.

### **What is a Special Event Contingency Plan?**

It is a written plan developed by the event organizer, which identifies potential emergency conditions at the event site(s) and prescribes the procedure to follow to minimize or prevent loss of life and property. A special event contingency plan is tailored to site-specific conditions and to the requirements of the event organizer that owns or regulates the sites(s) of the event.

### **Why is it Important to Have a Special Event Contingency Plan?**

A Special Event is a unique situation that has the potential to develop into an emergency incident. Therefore, it is prudent for the event organizer to identify conditions or potential hazards that could lead to on-site and off-site related emergency situations or disasters.

## **COORDINATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SPECIAL EVENT CONTINGENCY PLAN**

### **The Planning Team Components**

Special Event Contingency plan development should be the joint effort of a planning team called a Special Event Committee – a group of people who represent a cross-section within a city / county departments that include, but are not limited to:

- Public works
- Planning and development
- Air quality control
- Environmental health
- Police/sheriff's office
- Risk management
- Public health
- Emergency management
- Park and recreations
- Communication/PIO
- Fire code enforcement
- Transit services.

The size, type and the location of the event as well as the overall activities are all areas that need to be analyzed in depth. Although each jurisdiction's team will vary somewhat, the team members are instrumental in developing a plan of action to mitigate any potential problems during the event.

### **What are the Components of the Special Event Contingency Plan?**

- Notification Flow Chart and Contact List
- Notification Procedures
- Identifiable Responsibilities
- Hazard Vulnerability Analysis
- Preventive Action Plan
- Emergency Medical Service Plan
- Access Plan
- Scheduling of events
- Maps of On-Off-site areas
- Parking Plan

### **Planning Meeting For Special Events**

In general, special event planning begins the moment when the event organizer decides where the event will be held and the date and location in a city or county. Pending the scale of the event, events more than 1,000 people or more will need at least one year or more to plan. One of the first steps in planning an event is to bring together those who are hosting the event with those who are responsible for the public safety within the community and other supporting agencies. Some communities already have planning protocols or systems in place; research the local community for a Special Events Office. Generally, a special event permit may be one of several permits and or licenses an event organizer may need to obtain. The Special Event Coordinator is able to assist event producers with many aspects of hosting an event. The Coordinator can provide understanding of the local requirements and guidelines of hosting an event and to facilitate services available for those events. In preparation of meeting with the Special Event Committee, the event promoter must get acclimated with the local ordinances and the permitting process. Do your research, approach the

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Committee meeting with your business plan and your vision on how you desire to execute your plan.

Most local ordinances require event organizers to provide a safe and secure environment for their event. The very term “Special Event” implies a set of challenges and circumstances unique to any particular event. The following list of security issues is by no means all-inclusive, but is intended to provide insight into the enormous considerations required to professionally evaluate and plan for a safe and secure venue.

### Relevant Laws or Regulations

Event promoters must usually gain approval from local, and sometimes even State, authorities to hold a public event. The following information should be available to the promoters before beginning the permit-approval process:

- Identify the approving authority and any other authorities actively involved in the approval process
- Relevant statutes, ordinances, codes and standards (i.e. mandated codes) existing for mass gatherings and events
- Documentation required supporting an event (i.e. community letters of notification)
- Insurance, bond, liability issues (i.e. \$1,000,000 or more pending the scale of the event)
- Relevant deadlines for the filing of application and permit fees, local and state.

Some communities offer a “One Stop Shopping” concept for permitting. The person requesting a permit for an event completes applications at one place and the information is forwarded to the appropriate agencies for their approval. The person requesting the permit does not have to track down the appropriate agencies to make a payment. The concept also ensures that all required agencies are notified and considerations are made before the permit is issued.

Promoters should be aware of the approving authority’s timetable for approving events and issuing permits and should include any potential delay in the event planning schedule. Generally, a special event checklist is provided to the promoter to expedite the permitting process with a permit due date.

As conditions for receiving approval, promoters may be required to provide feedback on the approval process and submit an evaluation before, during, and after the event, as needed. Promoters may be required to give in the form of debrief or a report to relevant authorities.

### Legal Issues

Some form of legislation usually governs or restricts public events or aspects of them. Some events, particularly extremely large or high-impact events, require special State or local legislation. Local ordinances provide health and safety guidelines.

Promoters are required to obtain a certificate of insurance or are encouraged to seek legal advice in the planning stage. Items that warrant consideration include but are not limited to:

- Liability for injuries
- Liability for acts or omissions
- Liability of financial obligations incurred in staff support, responding to major emergencies occasioned by the event
- Potential liability for resultant effects of the event on normal emergency operations.

Permits may be required for:

- Parades
- Road races
- The sale and consumption of alcohol
- Pyrotechnics
- The sale of food items
- Noise variance
- Parking removal
- Tents
- Amusement equipment
- Open flame
- Electrical permits etc.

Fire permits are generally required. Permission may also be required if it will be necessary for public assembly, for mass gathering, or to close certain adjacent or peripheral roads or streets.

Most private sector agencies have adopted a “User Pays” policy for services provided at events. The purpose of this policy is to improve the allocation of statute resources in the general community by providing a means of charging for services deployed to plan for, and respond to, events. Event promoters should consult local and State authorities to determine relevant fee structure and changes for services provided, including payment of overtime costs for personnel.

Promoters may be required to post a bond or provide liability to cover the costs of response to emergencies, subsequent venue cleanup, traffic and crowd control, and other policing functions.

The head of the planning team must monitor the progress that is made in satisfying all legal requirements throughout the planning stage of the event.

In addition, research should be done in advance to determine, how does your special event connect to the local community strategic plan? What value does an event bring to a community? Are there statutory authority and emergency powers (i.e. FEMA Incident Command structure, evacuation, etc.) of the various parties involved?

### Venue/Site

You may need to consider a number of alternative venues for an event. Emergency managers may be able to recommend appropriate venues based on health and safety considerations.

Finding a suitable venue or set of venues can be difficult. Obtain maps, diagrams, and photos, walk the venue, read past plans. The objective is to look for common causes of injuries. Answering the following questions during the planning stage can aid in the selection of an appropriate event site:

- Will staging the event require multiple venues?
- Is the event regularly conducted at a temporary venue?
- Is the event a “one-of-a-kind” project at a temporary venue?
- What services and utilities are available at the venue?
- What additional services and utilities will be required at the venue?
- Is there a need for backup services or utilities (i.e. redundant services)?

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A universal map/grid referencing system for the entire event footprint should be developed in advance for all attendees and event staff (including public safety personnel) to allow for the rapid identification of event specific facilities and other locations in an emergency.

- What are the identifiable risks and hazards, have you ranked each risks or hazard?
- Does the date of the event conflict with other events to be conducted in the area?
- Will seasonal weather require a special contingency planning?
- Have you provided for the needs of people with disabilities?
- What shelter facilities are available at the following locations?
- Transport pick-up and drop-off area?
- What is the duration of the event, and will it continue during the hours of darkness?
- Seated eating areas?
- Pedestrian thoroughfares?
- First aid and medical support?
- Live Music, Bands, Disco?
- Stage Setup?
- Live Radio/TV Broadcasts?
- What is the parking plan?
- Beer and or Wine Gardens?
- Centralized Command Post?
- Searches?
- Competitors and officials' marshalling areas?
- Lost and Found?

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### Economic Issues

Special Events often bring attention and significant economic benefits and opportunities to local communities. These could include an influx of revenue into the local community, such as the hotel, restaurant industry and tourism.

Local planners must not sacrifice public safety for the sale of economic benefit; certain businesses in the community may be adversely affected by certain requirements of special events, such as closing streets in a commercial district or increase traffic in residential areas.

### Getting Started - What is Your Plan?

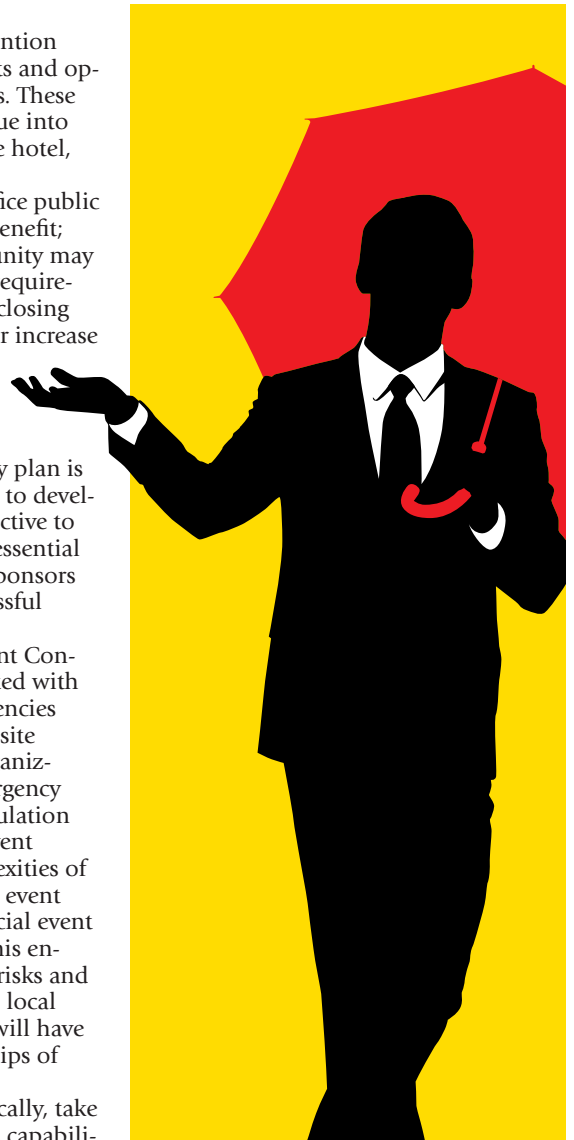
Planning an event contingency plan is a joint effort and a valuable tool to develop as an event planner. The objective to developing a plan is to provide essential information to organizers and sponsors that will ensure a safe and successful outdoor event.

Development of a Special Event Contingency Plan must be coordinated with all entities, jurisdictions, and agencies that would be affected by an on-site emergency beyond the event organizer's capability or an off-site emergency attributed to the temporary population increase because of the event. Event organizers are faced with complexities of issues that can surface during an event and can be assured having a special event contingency plan will assist in this endeavor. By identifying potential risks and hazards, the event organizer and local public safety response agencies will have the opportunity to take ownerships of their roles and responsibilities.

The finished plan will, realistically, take into account each organization's capabili-

ties and each agency will be fully aware of individual responsibilities. The question remains, what is your plan?

Remember, an event organizer is legally and morally obligated to ensure that the necessary resources and personnel are available to take action to minimize harm during and after an event...



**Cheryl Lawrence** is the Regional Program Director, City of Alexandria, Office of Special Events, Manages over 200 events annually including USA/Alexandria Birthday Celebration, King Street Festival of the Arts, 2000 Presidential Election Rally, GW Birthday Parade, St. Patrick's Day Parade, Annual Jazz Festival, Alexandria Food & Wine Festival. For more information please visit alexandriava.gov or email Cheryl.lawrence@alexandriava.gov