

SAFELY DOES IT

By Mark Breen

ASSESSING & EMBRACING RISK

I'm going to be taking a different tack with this column for the next while. I want to focus on more strategic tools and techniques that should be helpful when planning your events. Planning for the safety of large crowds at events has, in recent years, become a true topic of study and learning in its own right. Not before time, either.

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I'm currently in the 2nd year of a 3-year MSc in Crowd Safety & Risk Analysis in Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom. It's the first of its type in the world and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. One of the major benefits we're finding with the course is the introduction to, and development of, a number of tools & techniques that are proven to work in the real world. Some of us, having training with Professor G. Keith Still previously, have been using these tools for some time. Others have begun to use them more recently and are seeing immense benefit.

Over the next few columns, I plan to introduce a number of them here and hopefully they'll be of use to you in your own event planning life. Key

among those will be the following:

- Risk Mapping
- The application of the DIM-ICE matrix when planning events
- RAMP Analysis
- Real-time Decision Support Tools

They are all fancy-sounding names for simple things that can make our lives as event organisers that much easier and, as a result, can help ensure our audience / attendees are that much safer.

For this column I want to look at Risk Assessments for events as a general concept and begin to do two things:

1. Demystify them and make them less scary
2. Explore their limitations and look to how we can do them better.

Embracing Risk

We need to embrace risk. Risk isn't necessarily bad and it doesn't necessarily mean we can't do things. The only event with no risk is the event that doesn't happen.

Consider the Red Bull stable of events. X-Fighters is people on motorcycles doing

'death-defying' tricks, being upside-down, letting go of the bike, etc. They often fall and are often hurt. The risk is clear and obvious. It still gets insured and still happens. Cliff-Diving involves people jumping / diving from great heights into water below. It's quite obviously dangerous and risky. It still gets insured and still happens.

The Red Bull events are a good example of events going ahead despite clear and obvious risks. Risk assessments are performed, risks are mitigated against and reduced and the events get the green light from insurance companies, local authorities, etc.

Accept there is risk involved in events and focus on how to address them rather than avoid them.

The Importance of Honesty

I've written articles in the past outlining how the one key to risk assessment is honesty and I stand by it. A tick-the-box risk assessment worksheet won't do us much good when we're in court and are found out to have ignored what was a reasonably foreseeable risk.

Event Risk Assessment Procedure

Our Event Risk Assessment procedure involves the utilisation of this document to inform the completion of a Risk Assessment Worksheet. We combine the Worksheet with Risk Maps. The Risk Maps acknowledge the relationship between risk and time during the event.

Factor	Likelihood	Impact	Guidance
1	Almost impossible	Minor accident	Scratch / bruise but no lost time
2	Very unlikely	Lost time accident	Temporary minor injury requiring First Aid
3	Unlikely	Reportable accident	Temporary but serious injury e.g. bone fracture
4	Likely	Severe injury	Permanent disability / loss of limb
5	Almost certain	Fatality	Death

Risk Assessment Procedure

- 1 Assess the likelihood of the hazard occurring
- 2 Assess the impact of the hazard occurring
- 3 Establish the Risk (Likelihood x Impact)
- 4 Plot the Risk on the Risk Assessment Matrix
- 5 Reduce the Risk with reduction / management measures, as appropriate
- 6 Establish Residual Risk

Important to Note

Risks assessed as RED / HIGH will not necessarily preclude an event from proceeding. These indicate risks that need to be reduced / managed. Reduction / management measures will be outlined in the Risk Assessment Worksheet. The Residual Risk is the risk level assessed with reduction / management measures accounted for.

Risk Assessment Matrix

		Impact				
		1	2	3	4	5
Likelihood	1	1	2	3	4	5
	2	2	4	6	8	10
	3	3	6	9	12	15
	4	4	8	12	16	20
	5	5	10	15	20	25

Low	1 - 3	Tolerable
Medium	4 - 6	Apply judgment
High	8 - 25	Reduce risk

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It's important we acknowledge the risks and then work to mitigate them until the risk is 'reasonable'. Only by going through this process can we actually establish whether the risk CAN be mitigated against. Ignoring it because it'll make life difficult is a recipe for disaster.

We need to be honest with our clients, all our stakeholders and ourselves. Identify the risks and work to see what can be done to reduce them to ensure the event can go ahead.

If they can't be reduced sufficiently to allow the event go ahead, then so be it. Be honest again. If it can't be done, then it can't be done. It isn't often a good event idea can't be made to work in my experience. We've run large bonfire events in the woods, 'audience interaction aerial shows', air shows for hundreds of thousands of people and aerial performances over moving traffic on Dublin's main street.

Be honest about the risks.

The Traditional Approach

The traditional occupational health & safety approach is inappropriate for the event industry. It does form an element of a comprehensive risk assessment exercise for an event, but it alone is not sufficient.

The risk assessment matrix we're probably all used to seeing (similar to the picture) is a useful tool to illustrate this part of the process but, from

an event perspective, it completely ignores a key element – time.

Risks at an event change significantly over time. We need to account for this during our risk assessment process otherwise we are a.) remiss, b.) not being honest with our clients, stakeholders & ourselves and c.) potentially negligent.

Consider the risk of 'slips, trips and falls' that we're probably all used to including in our risk assessments as standard. Now consider the main entrance to your event and the area immediately outside it (queuing, search, etc.) and inside it. During main ingress, when you may have thousands coming through, the risk of slips, trips and falls is likely high. At this same time, the risk of same inside your venue is probably quite low, as the audience are only coming in. Jump to a half hour later when the show is starting and the vast majority of the audience are in; now your risk level at the entrance for slips, trips and falls is very low, while inside it is a much higher risk.

Risk changes over time and this is especially true for events.

The Bottom Line

In the next few columns we'll look at how to account for the unique nature of events from a risk assessment perspective and will hopefully help you improve how you do risk assessments for your own events.

Mark Breen is Director of Safe Events as well as Cuckoo Events based in Dublin, Ireland. He is an award-winning event Safety Officer and one of the most experienced and qualified event & crowd safety practitioners in Ireland. He is a Specialist Member of IIRSM, as well as being a member of IOSH, EPS and ESA.

He writes and speaks regularly on all things event-related, particularly event & crowd safety. He is a Graduate Member of the Marketing Institute of Ireland and holds a Postgraduate Diploma in PR & Event Management. He is currently among a small class pursuing the world's first MSc in Crowd Safety and Risk Analysis, and already has specialist qualifications in Spectator Safety Management and Crowd Science.

Mark and the Team at Safe Events and Cuckoo Events are passionate about helping people run safer events and devote a lot of time to doing so. Mark is very active on Twitter @mark_breen, @SafeEventsIE and @CuckooEvents. The multiple award-winning Cuckoo Events website can be found at cuckoo.ie and the new Safe Events website is at safeevents.ie (launching 9th February 2017)