

SECURING OUR FESTIVALS AND EVENTS IN AN **UNCERTAIN WORLD**



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The Evolution of Threats to our Festivals and Events

While terrorist and homegrown extremist's attacks targeting festivals and events have been relatively rare in the past, recent tragic events at Breitscheidplatz Christmas Market in Berlin (hostile vehicle ramming), Manchester Arena (suicide bombing) and London Bridge borough (hostile vehicle ramming and bladed weapons attack) have shown that spontaneous attacks not previously anticipated, can happen anywhere and without warning. Closer to home in the US, we are all still trying to comprehend the underlying intent associated with the recent tragic mass shooting in Las Vegas.

Transnational terrorists and inspired, self-radicalized homegrown extremists have demonstrated both the desire and intent to attack crowded places by any means, particularly through low capability attack methods which are low cost, require limited capability (training, equipment and resources) but have a high probability to achieve a devastating effect.

This recent evolution in security threats has presented new and complex

challenges for local organizing committees, and their respective Law Enforcement and Public Safety delivery partners on how to protect our festivals and events where we bring large crowds of people together in one location, on a predictable basis.

A Risk Based Approach

So how do we balance the requirement for enhanced security measures to mitigate current and future security risks against the escalating cost of these measures and the impact on attendee experience?

To achieve this balance, it requires a transparent, collaborative and pragmatic approach throughout all phases of the event planning cycle between event organizers, municipalities and the respective law enforcement and public safety agencies.

By adopting a security risk management approach and methodology¹, we ensure that credible, worst case risk scenarios are properly considered and treated through the implementation of cost-effective risk control measures to reduce the potential likelihood of a terrorist attack

occurring, enhancing the ability to detect pre-attack indicators triggers (e.g. hostile reconnaissance), or in the event of a critical incident, reduce the severity of the consequences through the initiation of emergency response and management plans (ERPs) which have been exercised and tested with safety and security stakeholders prior to the event.

The Manchester arena and Las Vegas incidents have reinforced the requirement to look beyond the typical boundaries of the event site or venue into the "gap" or what's commonly known as the "Last Mile", from the point of arrival to the point of ingress for event attendees. Local organizing committees should now consider a "whole of community" approach with their Last Mile stakeholders on how to address and respond to highly improbable but catastrophic risks such as terrorist attacks.

The DHS² Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG 201) - Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) Guide, 2nd Ed. 2013, reinforces this approach, ".....an effective THIRA requires active involvement from the whole community" supported by a

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collective, risk based community approach to “preparing for, protecting against, responding to, and recovering from” human, natural or technological hazards.

Considerations for Safety, Security and Resilience

The following are a list of key considerations (not meant to be an exhaustive list) based on major event best practices, that local organizing committees should consider incorporating into their planning processes to enhance safety, security and resilience for their events:

- Build strong, trusted relationships with your law enforcement and public safety partners, including the protocols for the trusted exchange of information and advice; Conduct a security risk assessment to identify and assess the credible, worst case risks and threats that your event may be exposed to;
- Prioritize the critical assets and activities that you need to protect, their potential vulnerabilities and ensure that risk mitigation measures (and their cost) are proportionate;
- Your venue or site “secure by design” overlay will be more cost effective and achievable, if it is considered early during the event planning cycle;
- Embed security awareness as a part of your organisational culture for all event staff, volunteers and seasonal workforce;
- Allocate budget and time for emergency response training and exercises for event workforce – training builds team capability and confidence, particularly in the event of a critical incident;
- Conduct tabletop exercises, rehearsal and drills with your safety and security stakeholders to validate effectiveness of your ERPs within a joint agency operational environment; and
- Ensure that business continuity is considered – how your festival or event will respond and return to “normal operations” after an incident or other significant business interruption.

Parting Thoughts

It is an unfortunate reality, that it is almost impossible to absolutely guarantee the safety and security of festivals, events and crowded places in today’s uncertain world. However, it is possible to reduce the residual security risk level, to as low as reasonably practicable through sound risk management practices.

If a risk management approach and culture is embedded within your organization, you as event planners and organizers can demonstrate that an appropriate duty of care has been considered, and that reasonable steps have been taken to create a safe and secure environment for your festival or event.

Based out of Boise, ID, **Peter Ashwin** is the Principal and Founder of Event Risk Management Solutions (ERMS), a consulting practice committed to enhancing organizational resilience through practical and effective risk management solutions for festivals and events. Peter is a former Australian Army special forces officer who has been engaged as a consultant on over 10 international major events including six Olympic Games, the Toronto 2010 G8/20 Summit, and has worked on a wide range of festivals and events in the US including the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, Memphis in May International Festival, Gratitude Migration Festival (NJ) and His Holiness the Dali Lama visit to Sun Valley in 2005. Peter is a Director on the International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA) World Board and is a guest lecturer on risk management and event security at the IFEA / NRPA Event Management School and the IAVM Academy of Safety and Security. Peter can be contacted at peter.ashwin@ermglobal.com or follow his posts @ www.facebook.com/ermglobal.