



BULLETIN

PLANNING FOR EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Whether you are responsible for attracting people to a huge outdoor arena or a storefront amusement center:

- * How would you handle a phoned bomb threat?
- * Where do you guide your patrons if immediate evacuation is needed, whether for bomb threat or other reason?
- * How do you deal with patrons with disabilities?
- * Who makes sure people in restrooms, lockerrooms, etc, are notified and have vacated along with the others?
- * Who makes all these decisions and how do you access that person with information? And vice versa?
- * Who in the community can help you with the answers?

There are a lot of "little things" that must come together for an emergency evacuation to happen. The first is to recognize that the need is rare, and because of that, readiness must come from pre-planning rather than "winging it". If a NFL Club can successfully evacuate its stadium during a pre-season game, as one did in 1991 to avoid their fans' exposure to an oncoming electrical storm, any circumstance can be planned out if done in advance.

The details within a plan can be extensive or relatively brief. Everyone has his or her own needs, circumstances, and preferences. However, there are six considerations in any plan:

1. The decision-making process;
2. The information-awareness process;
3. The egress-preparation process;
4. The egress process;
5. The return process; and
6. The evaluation process.

DECISION-MAKING

- * Who is the point-person needed to make that decision of whether and when the evacuation is "go"? Who is his/her backup?
- * Who are the others needed to share in the pre-decision process, coordinating the major steps within the evacuation process, communicating with the community's fire/police and press, etc?
- * Are all people with responsibility known and readily accessible?

-- over --

Insuring the world's fun.

INFORMATION-AWARENESS

- * What criteria are in place for choosing to act? For example, how long before a storm is expected to hit should the decision to evacuate be made to give patrons enough time to get out?
- * How best can the type of information be obtained in time for that decision? For outdoor programs, a functional link with the local weather station for receiving and evaluating storm warnings in the area works well for many.
- * While management can determine who is the communications link for weather problems, phoned bomb threats can come to anyone. Is planning in place for managing that different source of threat?

EGRESS PREPARATION

- * Is there egress preparation planning that determines in advance how the decision maker can best alert the ushers, security, and related entrance/exit personnel that a decision to evacuate is being considered? A worst-case scenario in evacuations is having the patrons ahead of the staff. Planning provides readiness for the routes of egress that best serve the number and preferred destinations of patrons, including (a) the opening of buses in the parking area as temporary shelters, and (b) maintaining inbound lanes for firetrucks and ambulances.

EGRESS PROCESS

- * Is the decision to "go" after alerting the staff followed immediately by an announced set of directions to guide the evacuation? Pre-planned announcements, given succinct and calmly, repeating the message several times, can do much to minimize panic or disorderly egress. The same information can have been printed in the program and posted at strategic locations.
- * Are there planned "Sweeps" to check for lingerers, persons with disability, and patrons who suffer injury during egress?
- * Is there "contingency planning" for those occasions in which an egress route is blocked? Alternative routes need to be thought through well in advance of any need for such.

Return Process

- * Does planning allow for emergency evacuation that is considered precautionary and potentially temporary? How and when is the "all-clear" to be given? Do the patrons return to their same seats or open seating?
- * How is this communicated first to the same staff who handled egress preparation?

Evaluation Process

- * Is there a written detailed document for common reference and training, and common understanding of its contents? Are there periodic communication drills and subsequent refinement from the experience? Any plan can be improved if reviewed and tested, in part or in full, both by experts in the community and by the staff on which the plan relies.