

Managing safety at events

Key considerations for event organisers



Before the event

Detailed planning is essential to ensure your event is safe and successful. The following should be considered at this stage:

Scale of the event

Identify the aims of the event. Are particular groups or types of people to be targeted, such as young children, teenagers, the elderly or the disabled? If so, additional stewards or specific facilities may be required to ensure adequate safety standards are maintained.

Set a realistic number for maximum attendance. If it is appropriate, print numbered tickets to be sold or distributed through named contacts. Remember that one particular attraction (e.g. a pop star or band) may draw large numbers of visitors without tickets, so it will also be necessary to establish a crowd profile to assist with stewarding and crowd control.

Consider the time of year and the possible consequences of extreme weather conditions at an outside event. The nature of the event, potential noise levels and travel implications should also be taken into consideration when choosing the day of the week and time for the event. Ensure your event does not clash with any other major events in the area and that you have arranged adequate lighting if it is to take place in the evening.

Activities involved

Decide on the type of activities to be held. Will there be any specific hazards, such as animals or water sports?

Will the activities require the use of any specialist equipment, such as bungee chords and safety harnesses? If so, does this equipment pose any specific hazards? Will a particular activity need barriers etc? Some equipment may require certificates of erection by a competent person.

Infrastructure, including transport

Consider how people will get to the venue, any car parking requirements and the potential impact of severe weather. Also consider the suitability of the venue and any existing hazards that may be on the site, such as water hazards and overhead power lines.

Legislative requirements

Give thought to the relevant health and safety, environmental and food safety legislation. Are there any permissions, consents or licences required for the event, e.g. alcohol, public entertainment and road closures?

Risk assessment

Your risk assessment will be the key document to ensuring the safe planning of your event. It involves a careful examination of each attraction within an event and recording the significant findings. Follow these basic steps and try not to overcomplicate the assessment.

- Look for the hazards
- Decide who might be harmed and how
- Evaluate the risks and decide whether any existing precautions are adequate or whether more could be done
- Record your findings
- Review your assessment and revise as necessary

Roles and responsibilities

Identify specific responsibilities for all people involved with the event organisation. One person should be identified as the event manager and be responsible for liaison with other organisations, such as the local authority and the emergency services. One person, with suitable experience, should be given overall responsibility for health and safety and another person, coordination and supervision of stewards.

Liaison with other organisations

A variety of organisations will need to be liaised with including, the local authorities, highways authority, police, fire and ambulance services, first aid organisations, community groups and voluntary groups.

Timings

Prepare a detailed timeline, including all key deadline dates. Consider any legislative timescales, for example, applications for road closures.

Event Safety Plan

Draw up and maintain a comprehensive event plan. This should include all your health and safety arrangements. Once you have resolved all the issues referred to below, keep records of the proposals as a formal plan for the event. This will help you when carrying out your risk assessments.

Catering

Establish whether catering will be carried out by the event organiser or contractors. If you intend to use contract caterers or mobile food units ensure that they are registered with their own local authority and can demonstrate that they are trained in food hygiene. Environmental health staff may wish to visit the site and inspect the caterers.

Make adequate provision for all food traders to be supplied with potable water. It is a legal requirement for food premises to have a supply of potable water.

Temporary structures

Many events will require temporary structures, such as staging, tents, marquees and stalls. Decide where this equipment is to be obtained, who will erect it and what safety checks will be required. The location of any such structures should be identified on the site plan.

Consider whether barriers will be required to protect the public against specific hazards, such as moving machinery, barbecues, vehicles and any other dangerous displays. In some cases, barriers will need to have specified safety loadings dependent upon the number of people likely to attend. Temporary structures should only be obtained from experienced suppliers.

Welfare arrangements

Toilet requirements should be based on an estimation of the number of attendees and the event duration. The provision of drinking water will also be necessary.

Provision for those with special needs

Specific arrangements should be made to ensure disabled visitors have adequate access, facilities, parking, specific viewing areas and can safely enjoy the event.

First aid and medical provision

A medical risk assessment should be carried out, taking into consideration such things as the activities, the numbers, types and age groups attending, access and egress, the site and structures. Provision of adequate numbers and types of resource (e.g. first aiders, ambulances and paramedics) should be based upon published guidance.

Many organisations provide medical services, but you must ensure that the organisation you choose is competent, well trained and able to meet the demands of the event. Medical provision for the event should not rely upon the normal provision made by the statutory NHS Ambulance Service for use by the general public (i.e. "999" system).

Crowd control

The type of event and the numbers attending will determine the measures needed. Consider the number and positioning of barriers, stewarding and the provision of a public address system. The event risk assessment should identify the minimum number of stewards required.

Stewards must be fully briefed on all aspects of the event and be able to effectively communicate with each other, their supervisor, the person responsible for health and safety, and the event manager.

N.B. Only the police or a suitably qualified person will have the authority to regulate traffic on the public highway.

Lost and found children

Plan for a lost and found children's point. This area should be supervised by appropriately trained people. Written procedure for handing over children to adults should be available.

Security

Depending upon the nature of the event, specific security arrangements may be necessary, such as securing property overnight. Cash collection should be planned to ensure this is kept to a minimum at collection points and that regular collections are made to a secure area. Following your risk assessment, stewards or helpers collecting cash may require money belts or other carrying facilities. Counting and banking arrangements should be given careful consideration.

On-site traffic

Contractors' and/or performers' vehicles and other traffic should be carefully managed to ensure segregation from pedestrians. It may be necessary to only permit vehicular access at specific times and not during the event itself. Separate entrances should be provided for vehicles and pedestrians, with specific arrangements for emergency vehicle access. Car parking facilities will be required at most events and these will have to be stewarded. Consider where such facilities should be situated.

Off-site traffic

Unplanned and uncontrolled access and egress to a site can result in a serious accident. Traffic control both inside and outside the site should be discussed with the council's highway engineers and the police. Adequate signs and directions should be provided in prominent positions on the approaches to the entrances. If road closures, signs on the highway, traffic diversions and/or the placement of cones are required then an application must be made for a traffic regulation order and/or approval from the local authority.

Road closures/diversions

Any events that require a road closure or diversion may need to complete a road closure application, obtainable from the local authority. Applications should be sent a minimum of 12 weeks in advance of the event.

Public transport

Consult with the local authority traffic manager to establish if existing services will be adequate or whether a possible alteration of existing services is required.

Contractors

All contractors should be vetted to ensure they are competent to undertake the tasks required of them. Ask contractors for a copy of their safety policy and risk assessments, and satisfy yourself that they will perform the task safely. Always ask to see their public liability insurance certificate, which should provide a limit of indemnity of at least £5 million, and provide contractors with a copy of the event plan and arrange liaison meetings to ensure they will work within your specified parameters.

Performers

Ensure all performers have their own insurance and risk assessments; the same considerations will apply for contractors. Where amateur performers are being used, discuss your detailed requirements with them well in advance and ensure they will comply with your health and safety rules and event plan.

Facilities and utilities

Where electricity, gas or water is to be used, detailed arrangements must be made to ensure the facilities are safe.

Portable gas supplies for cooking should be kept to a minimum in designated areas away from the general public. The same should apply to any fuel supply items, such as portable generators. Generators should be suitably fenced to prevent public access from public areas. All these arrangements should be clearly shown on the site plan.

Electrical safety

Consider the entire installation and seek expert advice or consider specialist contractors. If the event is outside, consider whether it could be run off a lower voltage via a transformer.

Use a Residual Current Device (RCD) especially outside or in a damp or wet environment. This is particularly important for musical instruments, microphones, etc. You cannot use an RCD where a sudden loss of power could be dangerous, for example, on lighting systems or moving machinery. Use proper electrical connectors and avoid insulation tape or other temporary measures. Locate electrical leads safely to prevent tripping hazards. All portable electrical appliances (including extension leads etc.) should be tested for electrical safety and a record kept. Any hired equipment should come with a certificate of electrical safety.

Emergency lighting

At small events, torches may be sufficient, but large events will need standby or continuously operating generators. Ensure earthing rods are used where applicable.

Manual handling (lifting & carrying)

Assess the venue and the tasks involved in creating the event. What will need to be moved and how will you do it? Will there be awkward, heavy items such as beer barrels or marquees? Is the object to be moved heavy, slippery, and uneven in weight or shape? Think about its final location - is it up or down stairs? Does it need to fit into a tight space? Who is doing the work? Are there enough people? Their age, sex, strength and fitness should all be considered. Whenever possible use aids and equipment such as sack barrows to help with the task.

Adverse weather

Poor ground conditions will create an instant danger to vehicle and pedestrian traffic. In this instance, you should consider providing a four wheel drive vehicle or tractor to assist participants whose vehicles are affected and a wheel wash to prevent transfer of mud from the site to the highway. The employment of professional private contractors to undertake vehicle parking and on site management should be considered.

Contingency plans

Thought should be given to the implications on the event of extreme weather conditions. Will the event be cancelled? Could specialist matting be hired in at short notice? Or could the event be moved to an alternative inside venue? This will involve a lot of planning and may be too complex for anything other than the smallest of events. There could also be other scenarios, which should be planned for, such as dealing with a disappointed crowd if the main attraction has not turned up.

Clearing up

Arrangements may be required for waste disposal, rubbish clearance and recycling both during and after the event. Individuals should be designated specific responsibilities for emptying bins and clearing the site.

Site plan

A site plan should be drawn up identifying the position of all the intended attractions and facilities. Plan out and designate the entrance and exit points, circulation routes, vehicle access and emergency evacuation paths.

During the event – on the day

Final preparations – just prior to the event carry out a detailed safety check including:

Routes

Ensure clear access and exit routes and adequate circulation within the site. Pay particular attention to emergency routes.

Inspections

A walk-through inspection of the site should be carried out immediately prior to, during and after the event to identify any potential hazards and to check communications are working. You may want to carry out more than one inspection during the event. All defects should be noted and remedial action taken.

Siting

Make sure that all facilities and attractions are correctly sited in accordance with your site plan. Be certain that the first aid facilities, fire extinguishers and any cash collection boxes are in place. Check waste bins are in their correct locations.

Signage

Ensure adequate signage is displayed where necessary. This should include emergency exits, first aid points, fire points, information points, lost/found children points and other welfare facilities, such as toilets and drinking water. Remember that only previously approved signage may be used on the highway.

Vehicles

Check that all contractors', performers' and exhibitors' vehicles have been removed from the site or parked in the designated area before the public are permitted to enter.

Structures

Ensure all staging, seating, marquees and lighting structures have been erected safely and that certification has been obtained from the relevant contractors as a record of this.

Barriers

Check that all barriers and other protection against hazards are securely in place and there is no risk of falling from staging or other facilities.

Stewards

Make sure that all staff have arrived and are in their correct location.

Ensure all stewards are wearing the correct clothing for easy identification. Make sure the communication systems work.

Lighting

Check all lighting is working, including any emergency lighting.

Public information

Make sure the public address system is working and can be heard in all areas.

Briefing

Check that all stewards and staff have been fully briefed and understand their responsibilities.

Ensure you document all checks and follow your event safety plan and risk assessment.

After the event

Site condition

After the event, another inspection should be carried out to ensure nothing has been left on the site that could be hazardous to future users. This inspection should also identify any damage, which may have been caused during the event. If any structures are left overnight, ensure they are left in a safe condition and are safe from vandalism. If numerous structures are left, specific security arrangements may be required.

Accidents

If an accident occurs, the names and addresses of victims and witnesses should be obtained, photographs taken and a report made by the organisers. An accident form should be completed and a copy sent to the landowner. You will also need to advise your own insurance company. If any accident or dangerous occurrence is reported, action must be taken to prevent any further incidents taking place.

Debrief

After the event organise a debrief so that any lessons learnt can be noted. Review the risk assessment and make a note of improvements/changes that could be made for similar events organised in the future.

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