Quick Guide

Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience

Safety and security of crowded places

Speed read

- People's safety on site falls under the *Work Health and Safety Act*. Breaches of these laws are criminal acts and managers of a crowded place have a duty of care.
- Crowd management maintains order and is a proactive approach to manage the expectation of the attendees, minimise the potential for overcapacity and provide a systematic approach to elements of crowd movement.
- Understand the potential for hostile acts in crowded places and management's options to prevent or mitigate consequences.

Key points

Safety and security risks in crowded places:

- **Hostile acts –** Crowded places are targets for individuals and groups desiring to disrupt, generate fear and inflict casualties. The psychosocial impact of witnessing or being in proximity of a hostile act can be significant and have wide-reaching impact.
- **Harassment and abuse –** Busy, public places present risk of harassment and abuse (including sexual harassment), particularly for more vulnerable people such as people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), women, children. Put specific measures place to encourage a safe culture of prevention, identification and reporting of incidents.
- **Hazards –** Hazards in crowded places can include general safety and safety hazards and should also include awareness of hazards associated with big-event factors, such as gas, fire, electrical, and risks with stage and equipment set up, use and repairs.
- **Alcohol and drugs –** Presence or sale of alcohol and drugs may catalyse or exacerbate unruly and antisocial crowd behaviour and make people more vulnerable to accidents or harassment. This may significantly increase the number of patients presenting to on-site medical and first aid services.
- **Specific high-risk areas and events –** High-risk events involving fireworks and lasers can become catastrophic. Use a risk management contractor with experience and specific qualifications for high-risk events.

Safety and security solutions in crowded places:

- **Crowd management plan –** When planning, consider the risks mentioned above, event / crowd characteristics, entrances / exits, personnel, and current codes, standards and regulation. Plans should be informed by and aligned with risk assessments, communication and engagement and incident and emergency plans.
- **Site design and site map –** Major incidents in crowded places over are often linked to poor site design. Design and use a site map and plan to consider context-specific factors, such as flow patterns in crowds, ingress, egress (entrance and exits), circulation, choke points and queuing areas. Follow federal, state and territory standards, legislation and building codes, and local rules and regulations (including for fire exits and evacuation procedures).

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- **A culture of safety and security –** A happy crowd is safer than an unhappy one. Foster goodwill and nurture a safe and secure organisational culture that is resilient to risks and hostile acts. An effective safety and security culture means a culture of reporting, transparency and accountability with staff. Send messages to attendees and the community before an event outlining acceptable behaviour and antisocial behaviour to help people self-moderate and reinforce safe behaviour.
- **Personnel –** Ensure appropriate safety and security expertise is on hand during the event, and during planning, monitoring and review. Personnel can include:
  - Safety officers, who input into risk assessments and mitigation strategies, report and record incidents, identify hazards and plan responses, and liaise with regulatory authorities.
  - Maintenance staff, such as plumbers and electricians – are key to have immediately available and preferably on-site to reduce the likelihood that a problem will escalate to a public health and safety incident.
  - Police and security personnel – Roles and responsibilities will vary between events and must be clearly established e.g. having an on-site presence or being called in during emergencies.
- **Communication –** Plans should reflect the strong link between communication and safety. When planning communications with safety and security in mind, remember to include engagement with local hospitals and emergency service agencies before and after events. A well-identified and publicised, appropriately located on-site information centre can reduce pressure on security and health workers by providing useful information services to attendees and being a go-to place for safety and security questions or reports. Signage is a major safety and security communication method to provide information to crowds, so design and test key messages in relevant languages, jargon-free, clear and with visuals guides.

Take action

- Develop a safety plan – guidance on page 44 of the Handbook
- Develop a crowd management plan – guidance on page 51 of the Handbook
- Complete the Crowded Places Assessment Tool and Security Audit to gauge site-specific hostile attack risk level (Australia's Strategy for Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism)

More information

- Safe and Healthy Crowded Places has checklists and more information on managing hostile acts, guidelines and regulations for event managers, crowd psychology and crowd science, sexual assault and harassment guidelines and media coverage of incidents (AIDR 2024)
- Australia's Strategy for Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism (2017)
- More detail on evacuation planning: Evacuation Planning (AIDR 2017)
- Incident Management (AIDR 2022)
- Lessons Management (AIDR 2019)
- Emergency Planning Handbook (AIDR 2020)
- Community Recovery Handbook (AIDR 2018)