

The New Age of Safety and Venues – Part One

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Since September 11 '01 public safety scenarios and consequences have changed while management procedures have had to be re-thought and updated. At last years Australian Rules Football Grand Final in Melbourne patrons were overheard commenting that 'this is the biggest sporting event in the World since September 11. Could we be a target for terrorists?'

Places of public assembly in Australia, like elsewhere in the world, provide potential targets for major crowd safety incidents. That is something most of us realize as participants and organizers. But what is being done to make our events safer? Or, is Australia too far removed from the rest of the world to be threatened?

If you agree that we face a threat, then the next question is, what is being done about it? Have venue managers and the Venue Managers Association - Asia Pacific (VMA) addressed potential disasters and responses? Warnings and potential responses have been outlined by government officials, and acted upon to some degree. But are we doing enough?

Maybe our (Australians) attitude can be best described by Mr. Thomas Schieffer (the US ambassador to Australia), who said recently that Australians are just as oblivious to the prospect of a terrorist attack as Americans were before September 11 last year. In a warning against complacency, Mr. Schieffer said he was concerned that many Australians had not faced up to the possibility of a domestic terror attack.

Mr Schieffer, posted to Australia in July, 2001, said that he saw some similarities between Australia now and the pre-September 11, 2001 America. "Maybe it's a misplaced concern; maybe it's just a gut feeling that the average Australian doesn't think it can happen here," he said. "The thing that worries me is that's

exactly the attitude we had in the US before September 11, and I'm talking about the average guy in the street."¹

Does Australia think that it is so far away from the rest of the World that it doesn't have to worry? The Australian Government certainly doesn't believe so in a recent joint Press Release to the Nation.

The Minister for Health and Ageing Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, The Minister for Defence, Leader of the Government in the Senate Senator the Hon. Robert Hill and the Attorney- General the Hon. Daryl Williams AM QC MP announced that 'Australia's capacity to respond to national security threats in any guise will be enhanced with an injection of \$150.2 million over four years to address chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) incidents.'

'Emergency Management Australia (EMA) will receive \$17.8 million to provide specialised equipment and training for the agencies and emergency workers who are first to respond to CBRNE incidents. This additional spending across three portfolios is part of the Government's broader commitment to ensure that Australia has all the tools it requires to combat terrorism and other threats to national security, the three portfolio ministers said.'

'EMA is a division of the Attorney-General's Department and is dedicated to promoting a national approach to emergency management in Australia. The agency works with States and Territories in the areas of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery for all types of disasters affecting communities and the environment.'²

The question remains, how would we have managed a terrorist attack at an AFL Grand Final? Or for that matter, a major music festival? Are venue managers reacting to and planning for worst-case scenarios? We hope they are; for our sakes.

Or do they think we are just too far away?

¹ *Sunday Telegraph* 'Risk of attack ignored' September 29, 2002

² Joint News Release 'Combating Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive Threats' 27 May 2002