

The New Age of Safety and Venues – Part Two

By Ian Weir

Venue and Event Management Services Pty Ltd (Sydney, Australia)

ian@venueevent.com

Since September 11 2001 no-one will argue that the world, as we knew it, has changed. Nor will anyone debate the ferocity of those events and the resultant changes that have been made, and will continue to be made, to ensure every possible means of safety and protection to the general public. We may not fully comprehend these terrorism actions, and reactions, but we now have to live with them in our daily lives.

The public have been placed under tighter security measures when travelling, visiting tourist and public attractions, accessing government facilities and places of entertainment (venues). Life has become stricter and we have learnt to become tolerant of new impositions to our movement.

Government and non-government agencies, across the world, have begun to improve security measures to curtail further acts of terrorism and reduce the impact on public life. Many, such as the Israel Police Community and Civil Guard Department¹, The Federal Emergency Management Agency (USA)², the Emergency Management Australia³ and Crowd Management Strategies⁴, to name a few, have availed their educational resources and publications, via the Internet, to the general public.

In fact, the Internet is a tremendous cross reference source of information for the community, venue managers, event managers and those with an interest in learning more about what they can do to avert and respond to all types of emergency.

¹ 'Terror - Lets stop it together' and 'Counter-Terrorism – General Tips for the Public – Suspicious Packages and Vehicles' available by arrangement through www.crowdsafe.com

² <http://www.fema.gov>

³ <http://www.ema.gov.au/index.html>

⁴ www.crowdsafe.com

One of the major potential targets for acts of terrorism is places of public entertainment, that is, venues or event locations. This has been proven throughout history and more recently at the Atlanta and Munich Olympics. So venue and event managers have had to address these concerns more thoroughly. Through increased security, increased bag checks and improved training and procedures.

In November 2001, at the 19th Annual Crowd Management Conference, the International Association of Assembly Managers (IAAM) issued a Press Release outlining their intention to “bolster our security measures in light of new challenges regarding terrorist threats”. Lionel Dubay, the IAAM president added further that “the IAAM has long been cognizant of the security threats to our patrons, communities and facilities-this is not a new concern for us or our members. The IAAM is driven by the overriding imperative to establish a safe and comfortable environment for our patrons to conduct their business or event.”⁵

The IAAM comprises leaders who represent a diverse industry--entertainment, sports, conventions, trade, hospitality and tourism. These leaders manage, or provide products and services to arenas, amphitheatres, auditoriums, convention centers/exhibit halls, performing arts venues, stadiums and university complexes⁶.

As part of the IAAM's new initiative, a 23-member Safety and Security Task Force was created, made up of facility managers, security experts and industry partners. Their job is to review and recommend benchmarks and guidelines to assist venue managers in revising and updating security and crisis management plans.

That group recently produced a Security Planning Guide for Arenas, Stadiums and Amphitheatres. The 28-page document was introduced at a June 27 2002 “audio seminar” sponsored by the IAAM.

The Planning Guide is said to advise development of up to four facility security plans, based on levels of security threat. The concept is actually the work of the

⁵ IAAM Press Release November 21, 2001

⁶ IAAM Press Release July 26, 2002

U.S. Office of Homeland Security's threat system. A checklist of approximately 150 specific security practices to determine specific venue and event security plans.⁷

To date, the promised Planning Guide hasn't been released to the media or the public for comment or scrutiny. Indeed the only resource issued has been the IAAM Safety and Security Task Force - Best Practices Protocols – Terrorism Response Planning for Venue Managers which was issued on June 20 2002. The Best Practices Protocols “reviews highlights of new thinking promulgated by U.S. agencies such as the Office of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).”⁸

The document and information is described as “adapted from FEMA’s ‘State and Local Guide for All-Hazard Emergency Operations Planning’. In reality it is a ‘cut and paste’ document, verbatim, from the FEMA document, available free through their website www.fema.gov.

As a general guide/information sheet, it is useful to make venue managers aware of the relevant procedures. However, one would like to know how the Best Practices Protocols is to be used and what is expected of the venue managers in relation to the instigation and/or compliance with the stated procedures.

Given our recent world history, one can fully appreciate the contents of the document, the reasoning behind its production and the urgency to address risks pertaining to venues and terrorism. But one must also question whether this document is purely a conveyance of information, to IAAM Members, for actioning/compliance or just another ‘bulletin’. If this is the result of eight months of effort from the Safety and Security Task Force then it is certainly a disappointing one.

Ultimately, the moment of truth arrives when (and whether) the individual venue managers, with the help of local and State agencies mentioned in the document, begin to instigate procedures and policies, designed to the individual nuances of

⁷ IAAM Press Release July 26, 2002

⁸ IAAM Safety and Security Task Force Best Practices Protocols - Terrorism Response Planning for Venue Managers

their venues. Not only is this step essential, it is required to progress to the training and education of the venue staff, (both full and part). Yet, the process of things is not clear.

For example, venue staff is potentially the first line of defence/contact in a terror scenario. They must be trained fully in the expected responses and tasks encompassed in their expanded position. All procedures must be comprehensively taught, rehearsed (regularly) and improved as new standards or procedures demand of these systems.

However, little time is generally spent on the training frontline staff (ticket collectors, ushers etc.) in even the basic areas of evacuation and the associated disciplines of each potential incident cause/response.

If a telephonist receives an overt tip-off, the correct questions must be asked and the information must be recorded in such detail that it enables first responders to make an informed and correct decision regarding the nature of the incident and respond accordingly. If the IAAM's Best Practices Protocols is aimed as a 'call to arms' for venue managers, in these times of concern, then one would hope that the correct steps will be taken to instil procedures and policies relevant to these sort of incidences.

Even with its serious shortcomings, the Best Practices Protocols does contain valuable information, including its list of contacts.

Nevertheless, the IAAM has not established a compliance mechanism for Best Practices Protocols. Neither is compliance a requirement of membership. So in the end, there is no way to confirm the diligence of each venue management or staff. This follows the association's long standing position of opposing a system of national standards or guidance for safety.

One would certainly like to think, given the state of the USA over the last 12 months, that venue managers would initially contact their local authority and then have their staff trained by the relevant local authority to identify and react to the Best Practices Protocols edict.

But how does one know at what stage this process is at unless this valuable information is available to all who are interested? Furthermore, the IAAM must continue to release updated information and procedures to ensure that the general public - their guests - are free of serious risk.

One must also ask why the Security Planning Guide for Arena, Stadiums and Ampitheatres isn't available free to a world that is desperately seeking information in order to improve their systems and procedures. As a world leader, as the IAAM state they are, the release of information is crucial to improve conditions world-wide at public assembly events.

The next live, interactive audio and Internet conference is to be staged today, at the time of writing, and one can only hope that the discussion themes and result are reported on the IAAM site for all to learn from. However, the IAAM has already fallen well short of their November 2001 Press Release: 'While the majority of the work of the Task Force will take at least a year to accomplish, there will be incremental releases of pertinent information throughout the year. There are a lot of practices that are already in place and can be publicized within the next few months'.

The IAAM security and safety report card is pretty ordinary to date, nearly one year on. But their response is not the only disappointing one. Other countries and aligned associations like the Venue Managers Association (Asia Pacific) has released little, if any, post - 9/11 safety and security information in the last 12 months.

Industry associations such as the IAAM, VMA and WCVM (World Council of Venue Management) must address the terrorist threat with greater haste and commitment. These industry leaders must make their documents available for world-wide cross-pollination so that the very best practices and standards can be developed. Anything less leaves us all that more vulnerable.