



RESEARCH REPORT by Meeting Professionals International

Security: Supplier Resources for Planners

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Event safety has a broad scope, and it's common for meeting professionals to feel overwhelmed. The bombardment of news on deadly incidents and weather disasters on any number of media—from television and radio to Internet, social and push notifications—can be distressing, especially for meeting professionals whose No. 1 job is keeping participants and delegates safe.

Before cable television, these types of stories had only minutes of air time. That isn't the case anymore, and this increased exposure to safety threats actually impacts viewers' wellbeing. Research shows the human brain doesn't know the difference between legitimate threats and illegitimate ones. It just knows fear—an innate sense of fight or flight that's kept Homo sapiens alive for millennia. So, as people watch TV or browse news sites online, they expose their brains to things that scare them—from weather forecasts to food contamination to disease outbreaks.

While these reports don't necessarily reflect day-to-day real-



ity for most people (or meeting professionals), it is rare for an event to play out without some kind of incident that negatively impacts people, property or experience. It could be a minor incident like someone tripping on a rug or loose cable or a minor illness (either of which could become more serious), or it could be more consequential like a false fire alarm or brief power outage. More significant incidents could range from weather emergencies or even active shooters.

As a meeting professional, you must be as prepared as possible for incidents that might occur, from the trivial to the titanic. Following is an overview of some types of threats, emergencies and risks. At this paper's conclusion are resources for meeting professionals to become better prepared.

THREATS | EMERGENCIES | PREPARATION

There is much to consider when investigating the steps necessary to prepare for negative incidents onsite at meetings and events. Start with just one and build. Here are some threats to consider when planning your next conference.

- **Crisis Communication.** In addition to managing (or delegating management of) social media, meeting professionals need to determine and direct a course of action to connect, contact and correspond with an abundance of other people and organizations before, during and after an emergency—from venue, staff and delegates to media, first responders and sometimes even emergency contacts.
- **Cyber Security.** Online security and

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data breaches trend often on social media and in news cycles, especially when information and corporate giants discover failures. What if your organization's data mine cracked and your member or attendee data was stolen? What if the breach occurred during your meeting, while onsite. While IT sometimes sits apart from the meeting planning process, meeting professionals recognize the importance of data security. #Eventprofs don't necessarily need to know how to program or purchase anti-hack software, but these are items that belong on their to-check lists.

- **Emergency Planning.** Some emergency prep can be primed by venues (but don't assume so) for threats such as fire or power outage. Assessing weather events, medical illness, active shooter and other threats is sensible, though it requires more time (and possibly money, delegation or outsourcing).
- **Environmental Safety.** Environmental

safety consists mostly of geographical area, political climate and other settings, situations and backgrounds. Is your conference city safe to walk at night? Have there been uprisings or protesters nearby? Is there a major sporting event in a neighboring area? Consider your office situation, work place violence or disgruntled employees, as well.

- **Physical Safety and Security.** A tenet of meeting safety and security is ensuring the space, facility or venue is free from harm and offers components and measures that keep it free from harm. It's easy to overlook this element, because many facilities have safety and security plans and mechanisms in place. Regardless of the perception of safety (bell staff, soft music, guards), not all places are safe, and meeting professionals should always ask themselves, “Is this a safe place?” Ask if the venue has security cameras and whether and how often it trains staff on safety. Look for well-lit outdoor spaces and keycard-secured indoor places and check for the assortment of other items on your safety and security list.
- **Reputation/Public Relations.** When an incident occurs at a meeting or event, there can be reputational risk associated with it. Meeting professionals and their brands have a fiduciary responsibility to manage communications with attendees and media and should have plans in place for protecting the message associated with any incidents that occur onsite.

OBLIGATION, AND BEYOND

Meeting professionals must act to keep participants and delegates safe.

“Planners have a legal duty to take care of their attendees,” says attorney Tyra Hilliard, CMP, an assistant professor of business and hospitality at the College of Coastal Georgia. “To live up to this duty, they need to use due diligence when planning and managing a meeting, including choosing a safe facility and suppliers.

To create a safe space, Hilliard says meeting professionals don't need to have an absolute obligation, but they must do “what a reasonably prudent meeting planner would do to ensure that the meeting and attendees are safe.”

Can the same be said about suppliers? Yes, according to Hilliard. “Suppliers have the duty to keep their premises safe

and secure, as well as keeping the people invited onto their premises for business purposes reasonably safe from harm,” she says.

However, what’s reasonable for a supplier may vary. A venue’s responsibility can alter for guests or attendees, as opposed to someone who has merely wandered into the lobby to take a respite from outside, for example.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

What meeting professionals do regarding safety shuffles across a wide spectrum. Some do little to nothing and some have

if there’s a situation, she will defer to the hotel and they will take point.

“I don’t think this is the correct approach any further and am working on a methodology for approaching safety and security more proactively in the future,” she says. But should her emergency plan should take precedence over the hotel’s? “I work with smallish groups of 100 to 500 mostly, so going to a property and indicating that we have a plan in place and that they need to follow it doesn’t seem quite appropriate either.”

The concern, in part, comes from lack of communication between planners and

pliers. They are an important part of your planning team and not your adversary.”

The onus is on the meeting professional, as venues may believe or assume the planner doesn’t need or want more than a glossing over of emergency planning. “A planner who wants to have an emergency response plan that integrates the venue’s plan needs to know what the venue’s internal protocol is,” Zavada says. “Planners and venues need to dig deeper and become more comfortable working on this together. After all, both parties have a stake in the game.”

In searching out actual feedback and input from meeting professionals regarding safety plans, few are willing to go “on record” and volunteer information. No planner wants to be judged or look foolish for not having a safety plan—or not having an effective one.

Matters don’t improve with so much discrepancy in putting something together for safety and emergency planning. Where to start? What to include? Who’s in charge? A common thread among industry professionals is simply not knowing the first step.

In most cases, meeting professionals do the minimum by asking venues a few simple emergency-leaning questions: Where should groups shelter in place? Where should groups gather offsite? Where are the best exits? Are AEDs available? Where are house phones, and what number is best to dial in case of emergency?

These are important to ask, but far from complete, and leave rifts in information and communication between planner and venue.

That’s changing. Many industry organizations, like Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and the International Association of Exhibitors and Events (IAEE), are taking those first strides in providing solid resources for planners and suppliers.

At IAEE, President & CEO David DuBois, began the trek for safety about three years ago, when he was approached by several industry leaders and asked to focus on safety and security. “We pulled together a committee called the Industry Safety Council (ISC),” he says.

“This group of industry individuals represented convention centers, event planners, show organizers and security professionals,” DuBois says. “It’s a partnership with our industry and convention centers and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Safety Act Office.”



“The challenges regarding safety issues with venues is getting them on board with a full event emergency response plan.”

created well-written, fully-structured plans. Many meeting professionals learn as they go, which isn’t optimal, but does prompt action.

Consider a recent event in San Francisco, where the planner hadn’t created an emergency plan for an earthquake. When one occurred, the group had no plan in place. Nothing of consequence happened, but the planner learned a valuable lesson: Be prepared.

“Generally speaking, I ask the hotel for their plans,” says Jennifer Cummings, CMP, president of CONCENTRA Conference Management Services. “The hotels often tell me they have one, but they don’t share the details, and that in all cases I should contact hotel security if there are any issues.”

Cummings says she doesn’t press the issue and operates under the notion that

venues. Planners might not think to ask about safety while venues might believe the planner sees no value since they are not asking about it.

“The challenges regarding safety issues with venues is getting them on board with a full event emergency response plan,” says Nancy Zavada, president and founder of MeetGreen. “They will often tell us that they will handle any emergency situations but are hesitant to disclose what their actual protocol is.”

To close the circle, planners and venues need to work together.

“Communication is key. Planners may not ask about sustainability or security expecting suppliers to offer this information,” Zavada says. “Conversely, suppliers are expecting planners to ask and when they don’t, they assume there is no interest. Remember to enroll your sup-

The project evolved into what has become the Academy for Venue Safety and Security (AVSS), which is managed by the International Association of Venue Managers (IAVM).

Meanwhile, MPI began working with the National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security (NCS4) to develop its *Essential Guide to Safety and Security: Meeting and Event Best Practices* and a 6-hour, intensive certificate course in incident management strategies as needed for the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from all-hazard emergency incidents. MPI also introduced a certificate in Crisis Communication with expert Alex Plaxen.

“We partnered with NCS4 because they were already creating best practices with sister industries, like marathon organizers (who have many of the same concerns as citywide event organizers) and sports tournament organizers (who might struggle with some of the same issues that small meeting managers face),” says Kristi Sanders, CMP, CMM, MPI director of community.

“We convened roughly 80 meeting professionals at the Risk Management Conclave and discussed six main areas of concern,” she says. “Afterward, NCS4 vetted those suggestions, compared them to existing governmental resources and best

practices and allowed the participants to review and provide feedback on the standards.”

Sanders also points out that *The Essential Guide* is a compendium of nearly 400 best practices on everything from how to conduct bag checks to strengthening an event’s cyber security. “It’s meant to be a resource that planners can use to customize their plans for each event,” Sanders says. *The Essential Guide* also references global safety guidelines, too.

Still, by and large, the feeling in the industry is most planners don’t do enough on event safety. Some will download a free outline to have on record for liability, but never really include safety as part of the planning process, where it absolutely must be included.

CLOSING THE GAP

Many meeting professionals understand the need to be prepared for a crisis but fall short on completion. Do venues and partners who contract with planners have an obligation to help, share emergency plans or help planners design their own?

“That’s a difficult question,” Hilliard says. “If suppliers truly believe that by providing their plans to planners, they are creating more risk rather than less, then they are not under any legal obligation to share them.”

A supplier’s obligation is to keep their facilities and the people in those facilities safe, she says. If they reasonably believe that helping a planner create a plan may ultimately interfere with the hotel executing its own plan, then they may reasonably decline to help the planner create a plan and perhaps instead, just reiterate what the planner should do if the hotel must execute its plan.

Hilliard notes, though, that there is a strict legal answer and a business answer. “From a business standpoint, I think it’s important that the parties discuss this and help each other. I think it’s important that the CVB, as an example, help provide community-wide oversight and coordination in case a crisis becomes a city-wide disaster, à la Hurricane Harvey, U.S. Northeast blackout, etc.” Hilliard says.

To clarify, this is not just because of a legal obligation, but to ensure that all parties are better prepared, better informed and ready to act in sync, and not at cross-purposes.

At IAVM, they understand that sentiment, too. “The liability comes from doing absolutely nothing to elevate the security posture of any event,” says Mark Herrera, director of education/life safety at IAVM. “When it comes to sharing best practices as it pertains to event safety, planners and suppliers should be sharing as much information as possible.”

He points out that some organizations hesitate to share these best practices as it pertains to preparation, planning, execution and recovery in fear of giving away the playbook. “However, based on the current threat landscape, the threat already knows the playbook, and we just need to share this information with all those involved in event planning in order to expedite and execute an immediate response to crisis,” Herrera says. “Failing to collaborate and share this information will delay the response and, ultimately, risk the possibility of losing lives as a result.”

VENUES AS A RESOURCE

At the Anaheim Convention Center (ACC), Richard Groscoft, CPP, safety and security manager, agrees with Herrera.

“In our post-9/11 lives, everyone has changed their attitudes toward having a safe and secure environment. Prior to 9/11 most events did not want a uniformed police presence, as they thought this might invoke a fear with their attendees that there was a threat,” he says.

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“Now it’s the opposite. People want to see visible security operations, including police, at the events and that does not invoke a fear of a pending threat, but shows that the event is thinking about safety. This is our new normal.”

ACC staff have emergency plans in place that serve as a baseline, since they are housed at the facility and provide convention center guidance in case of an emergency. “Once an event occupies the convention center, we now have booths, equipment, registration desks, display, equipment, etc., in the facility,” Groscoast says. “Every event brings in different setups and is unique, so we work with each event to ensure that they build on our emergency plans, so there is consistency.”

To deal with the uniqueness of each event, ACC has a distinctive tool at its disposal. “Our Security Control Center is our 24/7 security operations center,” Groscoast says. Here, security staff monitor radio traffic; access control doors, closed-circuit TV, fire and other emergency systems; and dispatch staff. “This is a day-to-day, go-to hub regardless of show activity,” Groscoast says.

ACC also houses a security command post activated during large shows or high-security events. It’s located in a secured area and usually staffed with convention center security, show security, police, fire and other public safety personnel. “This area is not rentable space for shows but is made available by the building (security manager) as needed,” Groscoast says. “This area also has access to the buildings’ CCTV system separate from the Security Control Center. This setup is comparable to a Unified Command Center in the police/fire realm.”

If the command center wasn’t enough, planners have other options at ACC, too. The center has a variety of local resources and in-house staff. “The Anaheim Police Department has a Resort Policing Team that works with the convention center on a day-to-day basis,” said Groscoast. That team can be available to attend pre-planning sessions to provide law enforcement perspective. “There is also an assigned fire inspector from Anaheim Fire and Rescue and we have access to rigging experts, nurses and a variety of other services.”

Organizations like ACC, IAVM and others are leading the way in supplier-supported event safety for planners and groups. That’s not to say planners don’t have a role. They still need to do their due

diligence and make sure emergency management is handled, even if the planner isn’t taking the lead.

Progressive safety action is in the works, as well, at the Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC) in Atlanta, which hired an Emergency Preparedness Manager in 2017. Though the idea had been in play for a while, the Route 91 Harvest music festival active shooting was a stark reminder about the needs of venues and planners. Marc Vincent was selected to serve in this capacity, and he’s eager to work with clients to highlight the safety features of the GWCC.

“The services provided by the GWCCA Department of Public Safety are predicated on the event make-up (size, demographics, type of event, etc.),” he says. “We work with each event planner prior to their event to ensure they have adequate resources for the event. We do have a process in place for event planners to ‘order’ additional services through our Contracted Public Safety Services process.”

The Emergency Preparedness Division of the Georgia World Congress Center Authority (GWCCA) creates plans and policies related to natural and/or man-made emergencies/disasters, provides technical guidance on the Incident Command System, ensures compliance with state fire ordinances and NFPA code, activates the campus Emergency Operation Center (EOC) as needed and serves as the main point of contact with law enforcement partners on the federal, state and local levels as it relates to intelligence and threat data.

Back in Anaheim, Groscoast makes a point that savvy planners will want to know—something Tyra Hilliard indicates as key. “We take safety and security very seriously. It’s much more than a legal requirement, it’s just good business,” he says. “Every event we have at the convention center is an event that we want to be successful. Part of making that successful is working with the event to create a safe environment for everyone.”

Meeting professionals can’t sit on the sideline and hope the safety to-do list gets done for them. As much as it’s good business for venues, the same goes for planners’ members, associates, delegates and other stakeholders.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

IAVM, part of the original committee with DuBois and IAEE on the safety council, has made leaps in getting both planners and venues on the same page. “All gaps

can be closed when there is a collective integration among planners, suppliers and all key stakeholders involved in the event planning process,” Herrera says.

To illustrate his point, IAVM currently provides live training within the industry inclusive of planners, suppliers, venue operators, emergency responders and anyone tasked with event planning and execution. “This allows everyone to understand the different roles everyone performs as part of the emergency planning process and as a result, amid crisis, the response is expedited with an end goal to protect the No. 1 asset—people,” Herrera says.

Herrera agrees planners aren’t doing as much as they could be doing, but at IAVM, they are working to narrow the safety disparity. “Two of the most common problems with emergency response planning include meeting and event planners not knowing what actions to take in an emergency and the lack of training and practice for those who have been assigned duties,” Herrera says.

All event staff, volunteers and personnel play a role in an emergency action plan, he adds, and they must be provided with proper training, since all have an integral role in the emergency planning process of an event.

RESOURCES

Meeting professionals who feel they don't know where to begin, or who have started their safety plans but don't know how to continue, have a bevy of ways to find assistance. Don't overlook the obvious, such as peers or industry organizations like MPI. There are also online resources like the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Homeland Security or Prepared BC, Gov.uk and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, for instance.

More importantly, build inroads with venues and suppliers.

MPI offers the aforementioned *Essential Guide to Safety and Security: Meeting and Event Best Practices* and two certificate courses. The first, Emergency Preparedness for Meetings and Events, introduces meeting professionals to techniques to 1) prevent and respond to crime, violence, terrorist attacks, natural disasters and ordinary incidents such as fights or drunkenness; 2) ensure the safety and security of all attendees; and 3) limit damage and restore services in the event of emergencies. (<https://www.mpiweb.org/the-essential-guide-to-safety-and-security>)

The second MPI certificate program is in Crisis Communications and helps meeting professionals in the development of a communications plan that includes auditing vulnerabilities, training spokespeople and establishing means of communication.

IAVM oversees the Academy of Venus Safety & Security, the brainchild of the Industry Security Council. It's a resource to help battle the changing and evolving industry environment. Emergency plans and protocols leading into an event should be consistently reviewed and updated.

"This takes a coordinated effort among all those involved in the planning process of an event to include the meeting planner, security detail and the venue operator/manager," Herrera says.

IAVM has a working relationship with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security

and its safety training and resources are complimentary. Planners can take advantage of all free available resources provided including the following.

- Security and Resiliency Guide Counter-Improvised Explosive Device (CIED) Annex for Outdoor Events Stakeholders: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/iafe/website/documents/DHS/IEDOutdoorEvents.pdf>
- Active Shooter Page-Resources: <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
- Homeland Security Information Network (<https://hsin.dhs.gov>)
- Commercial Facilities Sector Specific Agency (www.dhs.gov/commercial-facilities-sector)
- Hometown Security Initiative (www.dhs.gov/hometown-security)
- Soft Target Resources (<https://www.dhs.gov/publication/securing-soft-targets-and-crowded-spaces>)
- Bombing Prevention (www.dhs.gov/obp)
- Unmanned Aircraft Systems (<https://www.dhs.gov/uas-ci>)
- Insider Threat (<https://www.dhs.gov/human-resources-or-security-professional>)
- Natural Disasters and Extreme Weather (<https://hsin.dhs.gov>).

Resources outside of the U.S. include the following.

- Prepared BC (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/preparedbc>)
- Emergency Response Coordination (https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-protection/emergency-response-coordination-centre-ercc_en)
- Disaster Preparedness (<http://www.metro.tokyo.jp/english/guide/bosai/index.html>)
- Emergency Response and Recovery (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/emergency-response-and-recovery>)

Alan Kleinfeld, MTA, CMM, CMP, LEO, has over 25 years' experience in meeting management combined with over 15 years in public safety, much of it done simultaneously. He's a seasoned speaker, writer and educator and his safety topics have included site selection, safety overview, emergency operations and event safety. He can be reached at alan@arrivemanagement.com



Meeting Professionals International (MPI) is the largest meeting and event industry association worldwide. Founded in 1972, the organization provides innovative and relevant education, networking opportunities and business exchanges, and acts as a prominent voice for the promotion and growth of the industry. MPI has a global community of 60,000 meeting and event professionals including more than 17,000 engaged members and the Plan Your Meetings non-traditional meeting planner audience. It has more than 90 chapters and clubs in 24 countries.

For additional information, visit www.mpi.org.

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