



The Science of Crowd Management: Safer Crowds, Safer Work

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Q What steps can be taken to mitigate risk and optimize movement patterns in an environment that is highly improvised/fluid (ex. an immersive performance where there is little to no barrier between artists and observers, and people can roam freely rather than being confined to a specific “viewing zone”)?

A All the details of the event matter a lot when trying to sort out controls but you're really wanting to look at a shift from traditional boundaries into something that would be a soft control through system design, information, and oversight. The core really stays the same, we want to be able to anticipate how people will move, identify where risks can emerge and then shape that environment to that movement stays predictable (even in a more unpredictable space).

Your layout can still help to govern behavior even indirectly. Maybe this looks like deliberately positioning key attractors like performance moments, so they distribute people rather than concentrate on them. You can think of it like you using the environmental design to pill the crowd into safer patterns rather than push them with control measures, I think this situation relies heavily on knowing your crowd profile and behavior and using communication to really lay out your expectations and parameters.

Q What is the threshold for the requirement to use radios to communicate at an event? Is it based on the crowd size, or the geographic size of the event area or something else?

A So, in short there is no threshold in which you have to use radio communication, but when your communication needs exceed what can be reliably achieved through direct line on sight or verbal communication, radios or some equivalent system may become necessary. What we are looking at in legislation is that you need to have an effective means of communication appropriate for the level of risk. Which means doing a form of risk assessment for the event based on your communication systems. Now this does not mean that a radio is the perfect tool for all scenarios; there are other ways to achieve this compliance. Think, cell phones, overhead announcement systems, etc.

A few things to think about when deciding about communication tool would be things like:

- Your geographical spread and sight lines so if we cannot keep visuals or verbal contact over an area, so this could be multiple rooms, outdoor zones, or specific conditions then radios would be functionally necessary.

- How complex your team is, so if you have multiple teams or a defined structure than that communication would need to be coordinated and communication is juts made easier with radios.
- Your risk level, noise level, or potential for rapidly changing conditions would influence radios being an early and easy way enable intervention.
- Emergency planning, so guidance or communication to your crew during an emergency would be hindered by not having one. You ideally want to be able to provide really clear instructions fast to everyone
- Staff with the potential of working alone

Radio communication may not be required if you are a smaller, contained, line- of-sight environment, low risk, static audience with minimal movement, a really small team with direct supervision, maybe a controlled environment where you are using an alternative system.

Q We've had situations where people just stop moving in high-traffic areas, how do you deal with that without being overly controlling?

A This is usually a design issue more than a behavior issue. If people are stopping, there's typically a reason. A few things to look at might be, confusion about where to go next, or nowhere better to stand. The fix is often upstream: clearer way finding, better placement of attractions, or creating spaces where stopping makes sense so it doesn't happen in your main flow paths. The context and details of the event and space are really crucial to know before making any decisions about change.

Q Do you have any recommendations on training for front line staff in Canada? Often it can be hard to find training locally.

A There are training options in Canada, but they're quite fragmented. You can find pieces, like first aid, security training, or psychological health and safety, but very little that's designed specifically for front-line staff working in crowd environments.

There are also higher-level crowd management and emergency management courses, but those are typically aimed at supervisors or planners, not front-line teams.

What we're seeing is a clear gap for a practical, front-line focused course that brings together emergency response awareness, behavioral awareness, violence prevention, psychological health and safety, and basic crowd understanding into one place. That's the space we're actively working to support.

If anyone is aware of training in Canada that already does this well, we'd be interested in hearing about it.

Q Any in-person training seminars happening on Vancouver Island?

A We currently don't have anything set up for the island, but I would be more than happy to chat and see if the interest is out there; we could absolutely set something up!

We are working on developing some training for from line staff and any input from industry would be so helpful!

Q We rely a lot on volunteers, how much can we realistically expect them to manage in a crowd situation?

A Volunteers are a key part of the system, but their role should stay within observation, communication, and basic guidance They shouldn't be expected to manage complex or high-risk situations, unless otherwise trained to do so. Clear boundaries and simple reporting expectations go a long way in making that work safely. Training is really your due diligence with volunteers, making sure they understand the scope, role and expectation very clearly. Having the rest of your event planned with safety in mind is going to contribute a lot to making sure the system in which your volunteers work in is safe and well managed.

Q Do you have specific training around training volunteers in crowd management and emergency management.

A We are working on some specialized and specific training for front line staff and volunteers! We want to be able to tailor it to venues or events, so it really hits home.

Would love to hear your ideas and input into what you think would be helpful for our industry.