Providing effective security for major events.

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Major events such as sports games and cultural attractions raise unique issues for security personnel. To ensure a safe environment for all involved, these spaces must be effectively controlled through the understanding of the location, identification of potential threats and challenges, and thorough planning based on the collected information.

The overall goal of any security plan is to maintain a safe environment for all involved individuals, including participants, audience members and security personnel, and assets. This goal should drive every decision made in the planning stages as well as in the field.

Maintaining order is a critical component of achieving the previous goals. As such, plans should be proactive as well as reactive. Removing as many risk factors for disruption as possible lessens the necessity for implementing contingency plans.

Securing an event also means providing attendees with a positive and enjoyable overall experience. Actions to fully address potential risks should also minimize the disruption of authorized activities.

Before the event

Anticipate risks and plan accordingly

There are a wide variety of potential risks at major events which require contingency planning. These include:

- Weather. If the event is outside, weather can pose a significant threat. High temperatures can induce heat stroke and dehydration, while cold weather can lead to frostbite. Storms pose an immediate danger. High winds can damage equipment.

- Alcohol. The presence of alcohol can affect the behaviour of attendees, increasing the potential for conflict. Security personnel may have to provide assistance to those who have become ill or unruly from over-indulgence.

- Medical emergencies. With many people in one location, it's not unusual to have attendees fall ill or become injured. Plans should address how to safely transport individuals to another location, whether that be a first aid station or an area which is accessible by ambulance.

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- Minor incidents of disorder, including vandalism and petty theft. These incidents can be disruptive, but they generally involve a very small number of people.

- Major incidents of disorder, including violent public demonstrations and terrorism. These possibilities may not always be relevant to an event, but such incidents should be addressed rather than dismissed as unlikely, as they risk the safety of large numbers of people.

Early in the planning process, event organizers should provide the security team with relevant information specific to the event to assist with the planning of a security program, including:

- The context and history of the event, which may illustrate past challenges, how they were addressed, and how solutions can be improved.

- Details on the performances or other activities occurring at the event. Consider the potential risks of the activities themselves, as well as their effect on spectators. For example, large numbers of people are likely to move within the space in between musical acts, posing additional risk.

To secure vulnerable areas, it is critical to include a site visit in these preliminary, fact-finding activities. Access points should be identified and plans developed to address each one, depending on their purpose. Public access points can become bottlenecks, while restricted points need security protocols to ensure that only authorized personnel access them. A centralized command location should be identified based on the most efficient space from which to monitor the situation, allocate resources and respond accordingly.

With procedures in place, the next step is to ensure that staff are capable of consistently applying them. Training should familiarize personnel with all protocols, as well as more general skills, including:

- Correct use of body language to defuse situations and communicate intent.

- Decision-making processes for emergencies.

- Acceptable use of force.

- Proper use of equipment, including radios, gloves, handcuffs and batons.

- Avoidance of running, except in acute circumstances, in order to avoid causing panic.

- Constant communication between patrol members, including briefings when teams replace one another.

During the event

"An iron hand in a velvet glove"

The security program should be precise enough to provide clear guidance and allow the establishment of protocols. However, it also needs to be flexible enough to accommodate changing conditions. In particular, the number of attendees significantly impacts security plans. If attendance far exceeds expectations, protocols must be capable of accommodating it.

Besides creating contingency plans, there are also many proactive steps to be taken during the event to mitigate risk before it occurs. These operating procedures commonly include but are not limited to:

- Visible posting of uniformed security personnel. People are less likely to be disruptive when they know they are under surveillance and may be held accountable for their actions. This may include personnel at specific vulnerable locations, including access points, and mobile patrols making their presence known to the crowd at large.

- Plainclothes personnel immersed in the crowd. These individuals report on the mood of the crowd and identify potential disruptions before they become an acute situation.

- Searches of individuals. Many events limit the kinds of bags allowed because of the potential of bringing in materials that threaten the safety of others. Bags and bodies may be searched to determine if contraband is present. However, personnel should be sensitive to the fact that many attendees find such procedures embarrassing, and they should always approach these tasks with the utmost respect.

- Traffic control. Moving vehicles in and out of the event location can be just as complex as managing the movements of individuals.

- Coordination with additional agencies. If more than one security company is involved, coordinating them can increase the efficiency of all

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involved. In addition, the client may have their own personnel involved as well. Law enforcement and other emergency services may also need to be integrated into security plans.

- Allotment of resources to carry out proposed plan.

After the event

Document the lessons learned

After the event, it's vitally important for the client and security personnel to collaborate and review experiences. This allows all involved to identify what worked and didn't work in order to improve procedures for future events.

To this end, thorough documentation should be produced regarding actions taken at the event. This continued partnership also reinforces the desire to forge mutually beneficial, long-term relationships as well as dedication to client satisfaction.

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