

Special Event Security and the 9-1-1 Dispatch Center Recommendations for 9-1-1 managers

By Rich Abrams

A 9-1-1 dispatcher is faced with many tasks and multiple calls on every shift, but when a concert or festival is occurring within the response area, calls tend to increase. They range from the routine medical call for the ‘man down’ to the unusual calls, such as a hazmat incidents resulting from a staging company truck rupturing the saddle tank while backing up to unload equipment. There may be needs for additional traffic and crowd control from law enforcement, and perhaps a request for public works to respond with a dump truck to clean up garbage piles from the sidewalk. And if the event is a musical act, noise complaints may be received from disturbed residents.

There are some basic suggestions that can be followed by 9-1-1 and public safety dispatch managers to make the evening go well. First, as with any disaster preparedness, mitigate the possible hazards. Take a look at aerial photos and CAD maps of the immediate area surrounding the stage. Make sure that there is adequate parking, including handicap spaces. If necessary, consider co-operating with a local bus company or parking garage so attendees can leave their cars and be transported to the event. Bathrooms and sinks are also a concern, as people tend to lose patience if they miss part of the music while in line at a restroom.

Be sure to address any questions with other appropriate organizations or agencies: What type of seating is being planned? Will temporary bleachers support the weight of dancing or excited fans? If lawn chairs are allowed, are there adequate aisles for emergency responders? What about local merchants and restaurants? Have they been advised of the festival and have they taken precautions?

Next, police, fire, EMS and city managers should meet with the promoter with an eye toward manpower needs. This past summer, New Haven mobilized fire department EMTs on bicycles, police officers on horseback and motorcycles, as well as a mobile command post strategically placed to oversee all activity. Make sure that a common radio channel is used for on-site coordination so emergency messages in the rest of the city remain uninterrupted. The 9-1-1 dispatchers should have a basic idea of where personnel are posted, and the command post staff can then modify the response if required. For example: a call is received for a large crowd gathering on the edge of the park where the event is being held. Do sector cars respond or will one of the concert units cover the call? Finally, a good publicity campaign will help to cut down nuisance calls to the 9-1-1 center about street closings, parking lots being full, people hanging out on steps, etc.

If VIP escort and other patrol functions are also dispatched during the event, so public safety communicators should be inputting assignments into the CAD. At most of this summer’s concerts, the bands had a bus and a tractor-trailer that had to be strategically

parked and then driven away through crowds of attendees. As with any function that is attended by large crowds, expect the unexpected. People sometimes climb out of windows for a better view, attempt to sneak through the backstage barriers to see their favorite star, or defend their seat with a vengeance during the show. Sometimes a report of smoke or flames turns out to be a small barbecue grill set up by a guest. In addition, since there are souvenir t-shirt and poster vendors, petty theft can occur. At the last show of the summer season, we had a call about a suspicious person—it turned out to be one of the musicians trying to escape the crowd by ducking into an alley!

With the recent terrorist acts in New York and Washington, a final item is the suspicious package report. Stadiums and arenas are now enforcing stricter standards for attendees who have backpacks, bags, coolers and other carry-in items. If the bomb disposal unit is on call, the 9-1-1 dispatcher will know who to contact and what details to relay. Make sure that event management is notified as well, to prevent any panic and assist with crowd control.

In general, a concert or other festival presents unique challenges to public safety communicators due to increased vehicle and pedestrian traffic, medical assistance, fire department response into the event grounds, and law enforcement incidents that occur with any large crowd. Being prepared—knowing unit locations will make the job easier, and allow 9-1-1 staff to continue providing service to the rest of the community.

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