SAFETY AND COMMUNICATION IN STADIUMS AND LARGE VENUES

Keeping staff and patrons safe
while ensuring the best guest experience

Regroup

Contents

Introduction

Larger venues, like sports arenas, concert halls and stadiums, face unique challenges in routine business and emergency preparedness and response. Not only does the vastness of these facilities present potential issues for daily operations, they can create strategic nightmares should an emergency occur.

Venue managers and event planners take risk assessments and potentially unknown hazards into consideration when planning concerts, sporting events and other festivals that will attract large crowds. Even in normal circumstances, the possibility for emergencies can be high. And, the larger the crowd, the more that can go wrong.
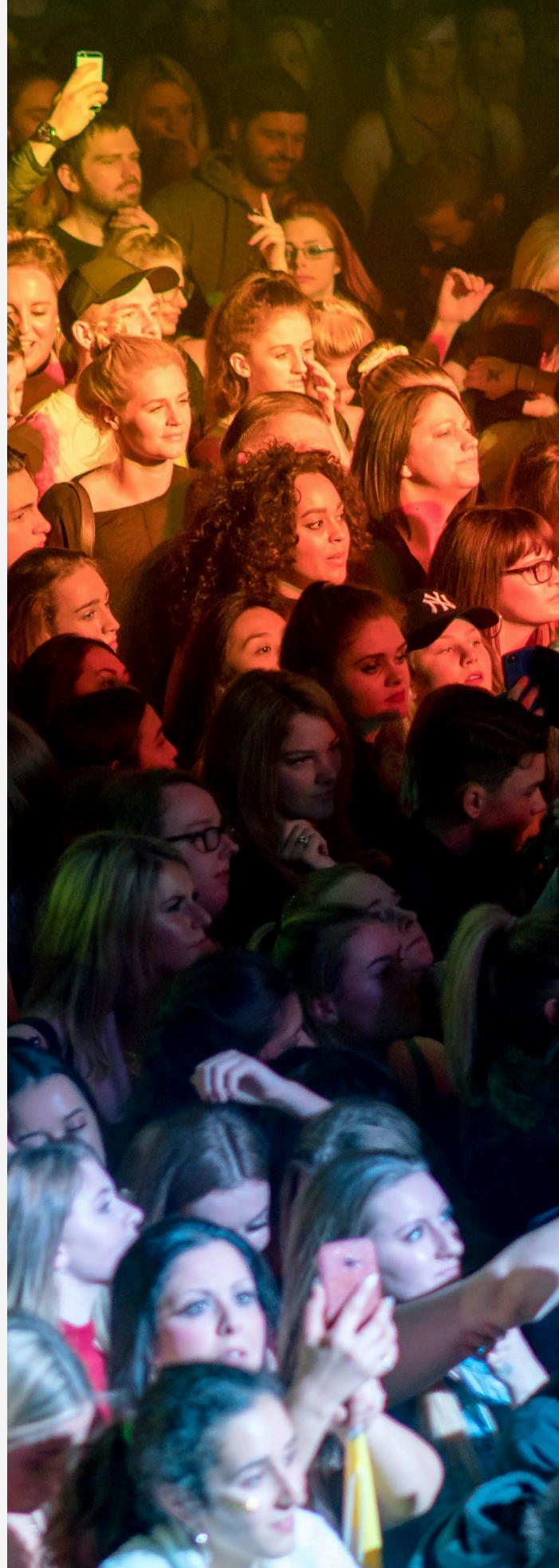
A History of Hazards

History tells us that large groups of people can set the stage for tragedy — even in the most coordinated environments.

One of the most notorious events in recent years is the terror attack at the Baraclan theater in Paris on November 13, 2015. During a concert, with 1,500 in attendance, gunmen entered the theater and killed 90 people. The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant claimed responsibility.

On October 1, 2017, 60 people were killed and hundreds injured at the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival in Las Vegas, Nevada. The open-air festival hosted approximately 20,000 people and chaos ensued as a shooter opened fire on the crowd.

Potential threats also exist in sporting events.

In October, 2022, over 125 people died and more than 300 were injured following a football match at Kanjuruhan Stadium in Melang, Indonesia.

Another fan riot broke out in February, 2012 in Port Said, Egypt. At least 73 people were killed and more than 1,000 injured.

Even without the instigation of violence, larger crowds equal greater risk to personal safety. Severe weather, structural vulnerabilities, surging and crushing and obstruction to crowd movement can all result in injuries to patrons and damage to assets and property.

By law, large venues must follow a number of safety requirements including adequate escape routes, fire safety equipment and first response equipment. However, when security and planning teams are dispersed throughout a larger venue during an event, communicating and coordinating response can become a serious issue.

The right approach to situational awareness, emergency preparedness and crisis communication is required to protect the lives of event-goers as well as property.

Threats to Venues and Events

- Fire
- Fan Violence
- Explosives and Pyrotechnics
- Use of Weapons
- Field and Pitch Rushing
- Crowd Surge and Crush
- Blocked Aisles and Escape Routes
- Suspicious Persons, Activities, Packages
- Bomb Threats
- Vandalism, Riots, Protests
- Structural Vulnerabilities, Collapse

Vulnerabilities in Large Venues

Every element of event venue safety requires its own measured approach. Because different situations and scenarios can arise in different areas of the venue, for overall safety to be a success, each aspect must be considered.

Other considerations, specific to each event, include size of the crowd, crowd capacity, demographic profile of the crowd, location of the event, day and time of operations, schedule of event activities, weather conditions, seating arrangements, crowd movement patterns, density of crowd in various locations, reason and shared meaning for gathering and other specific operations including transportation, parking, ticket selling and admission control.

Outside the Venue

Parking lots at sports stadiums are often host to tailgate parties before games. In many facilities, the consumption of alcohol is permitted during these parties, and those who overindulge may be prone to outbursts and violent behaviors.

There may also be the sale and use of illicit drugs outside venues. Such use can also evoke unpredictable behavior in some patrons.

The parking and common areas outside of larger venues are kept far safer through the use of security cameras (in plain sight), security personnel and cursory checks of event-goers for intoxication prior to their entry to the event.

The traffic flow in and out of a venue with clearly marked exits and entrances should also be examined to deliver a great experience for attendees. A plan to maximize the traffic path and meeting public safety needs makes it easier for people to leave a crowded situation.

Entrances

Gates and entrances to large venues can commonly have a swell of people as the event time approaches. This can make it difficult for security personnel to adequately check for suspicious activity and parcels, intoxicated individuals or weapons.
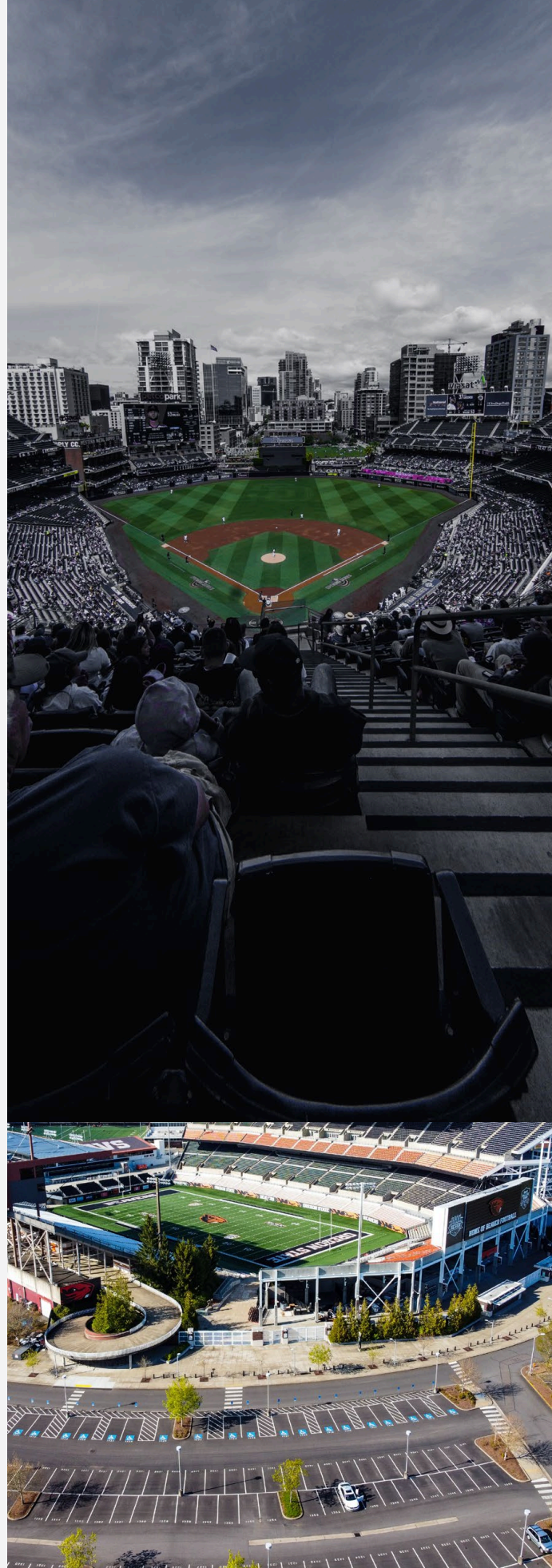
This can create potential hazards to event-goers and personnel alike. And, if admission is not conducted in an orderly fashion — with opportunities for individuals to leave the queue — additional risks for elderly, those with disabilities and those with small children can arise.

Common Interior Areas

Common areas, like concession outlets, restrooms and smoking lounges, can become hazardous when the crowd exceeds reasonable capacity. Additionally, if exits are not clearly marked and accessible to all (including those with disabilities), dangers can arise for patrons and staff.

Those waiting in common areas are particularly vulnerable during scenarios that can create mass casualty events. If emergency response is not swift and coordinated, many can be placed at high risk. Active shooter situations, bomb threats and threats of terrorism can all produce mass casualty events, and crowded common areas make the easiest targets. Forewarning of such events, through threat intelligence, can help improve outcomes. However, a coordinated and well-communicated response is essential to protect lives and mitigate injuries and property damage.

General Admission Events

Concerts, festivals and other performances that are general admission can be particularly precarious if not adequately managed. A crowd crush that killed eight people in Houston at a Travis Scott concert in November 2021 was primarily due to miscommunication around the size of the growing crowd and the overwhelmed event staff. The crowd crush could have been prevented with adequate crowd management.

Sporting events are not immune to risks like crowd crush and riots. Security teams in stadiums often deal with aggressive fans who act out during rival matches. These outbursts can lead to injuries, property damage and, in extreme cases, fatalities.

With general admission events, it is crucial for staff and security to carefully monitor crowd flow and traffic as well as individual behaviors and potentially rising tempers.
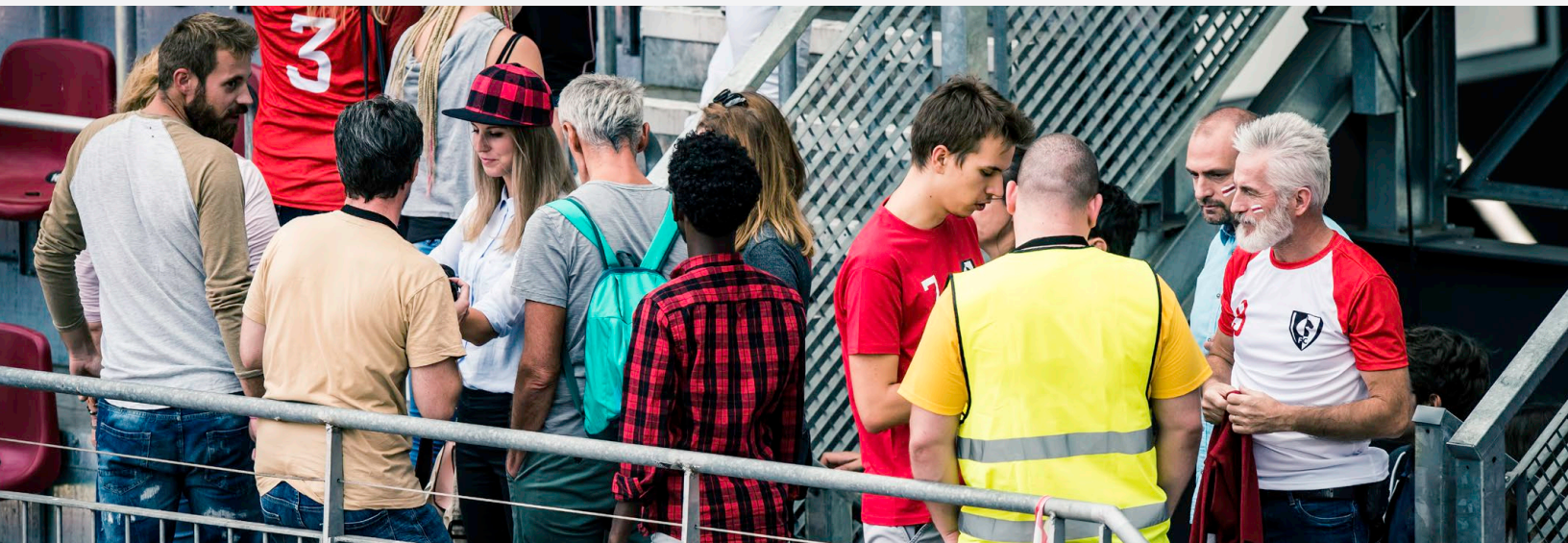
Using Communication to Bridge the Gaps

Large-scale events can only be well-managed with an overarching communication strategy. For both routine business and emergency situations, communication is key in ensuring guest safety and experience as well as the security of performers and other crew.

What often goes unseen by guests and spectators is the behind-the-scenes activity that is the heart of the large venue. Production crews, concessions, security forces and guest services all rely on the ability to communicate before, during and after events to maintain safety and the smooth flow of operations.

Communications for Guest and Spectator Experience

The logistics for hosting events in larger venues can seem staggering. This is particularly true when attendee numbers reach into the thousands. Each guest, however, has an expectation of safety, comfort and a positive experience.

To accomplish this, guest services, event planners and facility managers need to coordinate, internally and with vendors, to keep operations running seamlessly.

A mass notification platform can make these tasks far simpler and more effective. In contrast to more traditional means of communication — such as two-way radios or email — mass notification can deliver to a variety of channels, ensuring more expedient response.

IMPROVING GUEST EXPERIENCE

- Custodial Requests
- Production Crew Coordination
- Product Shortage Alerts for Concessions
- Backup Assistance for Admission and Ticketing
- Schedule and Staff Changes
- Area and Facility Sweeps
- Event Planning Updates

Communications for Safety and Emergencies

As we've seen, in recent reports, injuries and even fatalities in large venues can happen more often than we might think. Other threats, including severe weather and natural disasters, can leave throngs of people vulnerable to injury and property at risk of damage and structural failure.

Safety communications and emergency preparedness and response simply can not be left to chance. Your venue communications protocol should incorporate the most efficient means of getting alerts to the proper people at the right time. Very often, seconds count.

Personnel also need adequate training on your emergency communications plan and the tools you incorporate to facilitate it. Having an annual review of your preparedness and communication plan, conducting regular drills and allowing staff feedback can assist larger venues in honing their emergency strategies.

IMPROVING SAFETY WITH COMMUNICATION

- All-Clear Notifications
- All-Hands Alerts to Security Teams
- Two-Way Communication Between Teams
- Alerts to Signage and Public Address Systems
- Integrated Severe Weather Warnings
- Active Shooter and Other Alerts

The Right Communication Tools

There are a number of reliable communication tools that large venues and event planners can use for routine business and critical communications. However, a more holistic, combined approach can provide enhanced efficiency and more delivery options than more basic tools. For example, mass notification provides more advantages, reaches more recipients and is a more effective platform than email alone.

By harnessing the power of mass notification, you can better communicate over a multitude of channels and tailor both delivery and messaging to suit virtually any scenario.

Before committing to a mass notification provider, it's important to review available functionality and features to ensure the best possible fit for your needs.

Multi-Channel Delivery

Mass notification platforms all have the ability to deliver to more traditional communication channels, like email. It's critical, however, that a multiple delivery platform be used to ensure complete coverage. That includes delivery to text/SMS, push notifications, desktop notifications, mobile app alerts, corporate intranets, digital signage and voice channels.

Reliable During Outages

Does your mass notification solution deliver during power outages or when cellular towers are overloaded or disrupted? A cloud-based solution conquers this challenge by pushing notifications even when local services are unavailable.

Two-Way Communication

Two-way communication is essential for security staff. Often, real-time information occurs on the front line. This functionality can allow team members to report in real-time and get guidance or instructions from leaders when time is critical.

Automated Alerts

Your mass notification solution should have integrations with the National Weather Service (NWS), NOAA and IPAWS to deliver automated alerts when severe weather threatens the immediate area.

GeoFence Capabilities

With geofencing capabilities, you can target alert delivery to specific locations only. Using this functionality, leaders can automatically alert individuals entering an area of concern. Geofencing can also be used to notify individuals when exiting a specified area.

Alert and Message Templates

The ability to pre-draft alert templates for specific notifications (staff shortages, suspicious activity) can greatly improve the effectiveness of your messaging, reduce errors and help speed the process of notifying team members.

Multiple Administrators and Groups

This feature is particularly useful for large event venues. Each department (guest services, security) can have their own administrators and groups for more effective notification. For routine business, messaging can easily target specific groups by their function, location or department.

Onboarding, Training, Support

Does your current or potential mass notification provider deliver adequate training and support? Many providers, at a cost, can provide team training and technical support. However, to get the very most out of your platform, thorough training and 24-hour access to support are necessary, especially in times of crisis.

Final Thoughts

When considering a mass notification solution to complement your communications plan, consider both routine and emergency scenarios and how you will impart critical information to the team members required to respond. It's essential to employ a solution that is known for a robust environment, secure communications, multiple options and client support.

Using communication to enhance guest experience and safety in larger event venues can greatly improve outcomes. Even in emergency situations, the importance of having open lines of communication cannot be overstated. A comprehensive preparedness, response and communication plan can ultimately save lives, reduce injury and help you provide a memorable, positive experience for your guests and spectators.

Regroup

About Regroup Mass Notification System

Regroup Mass Notification provides a multi-channel, cloud-based mass communication platform used in emergency situations and routine business. Trusted by higher education, healthcare, enterprise and venues since 2006, Regroup provides a robust solution that is easy to use but reliable in times of crisis.

Regroup's mass notification system delivers quickly and easily to text/SMS, email, voicemail, push notifications, desktop notifications, its mobile app, corporate intranets, and a host of other channels through its open API.

Regroup offers a variety of unique integrations including National Weather Service/NOAA/IPAWS for automated severe weather alerts, Microsoft Teams and Active Directory, and a number of human resource tools and educational integrations for K-12 and higher education.

Our entire team is dedicated to continual improvement, finding solutions that work for our clients and keeping people safe, informed and productive. We're here to help.