

CROWD SAFETY: RECENT EVENTS DELIVER WAKE-UP CALL

FESTIVALS PREPARING FOR VIOLENCE AS MUCH AS WEATHER

by **LARRY JAFFEE**

Music festivals conjure images of large concentrated numbers of carefree people collectively reveling in live performances by their favorite artists. Of course, festival promoters and venues must take crowd safety seriously, often times focusing on bad weather to avoid tragic incidents, such as the 2011 Indiana State Fair stage collapse that killed seven people and injured 58 others.

However, continued terrorist attacks on Western targets in Europe for the past two years, as well as an assault-weapon rampage this past June at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla., that resulted in 49 deaths and 53 serious injuries, underscore the vigilance festivals must apply in safeguarding against acts of terrorism.

The ISIS attack in November 2015 on the Bataclan Theatre in Paris that killed 89 people and another 40 lives in a series of coordinated attacks throughout the city was “absolutely a wakeup call” to the festival industry, believes Russ Simons, managing partner of Nashville, Tenn.-based Venue Solutions Group, which consults with security options for sports and entertainment facilities.

One of the Paris attacks occurred at France’s national sports stadium, the Stade de France, resulting in four deaths, including three suicide bombers.

“The science of how we handle people at major sports facilities is pretty consistent with festival operations,” Simons says. At festivals, there usually is a lot more room for personal and bag screening with walk-through metal detectors stationed further away from entry points, he notes.

MINIMUM BARRIER TO ENTRY

Festival goers these days almost expect security as part of the experience, and without metal detectors, wandering and pat downs, attendees might be concerned, Simons notes, adding that organizers must accommodate ticketholders with medical needs and religious sensitivities. “It’s not just throw up a metal detector, and everybody walk through. Let’s put it in the right place to maximize the right amount of throughput, keeping everybody safe and making sure every part of that is consistent with the rest of the experience.”

Setting a secure perimeter before vehicles are parked and people enter festival grounds is difficult, points out Simons, “because it is difficult to clear every car.”

Creating a minimum barrier to entry “hopefully triggers a cultural change that we in the industry lack with respect to safety,” opines Jim Digby, CEO of the Event Safety Alliance (ESA), a non-profit organization that two years ago issued a production-focused concert safety guide, taking into account “the show must go on and on-time vs. covering our safety butts,” he added.

ESA’s 330-page Event Safety Guide, first released two years ago, is being revised with new material covering such issues as active shooters and terrorists. ESA is hoping that interested parties, such as the insurance industry, would underwrite the second version, so it could be universally available without a cover price.

At recent big festivals, such as Rock in Rio in Las Vegas this past May, “several agencies were

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involved in protecting that event,” says Digby, citing the FBI, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and counter-terrorism squads.

“The high-profile [festivals] seem to be doing more,” he says, noting a greater level of communication among local responder agencies. “We’re not in the business of anti-terrorism, obviously; we’re in the business of producing shows. Production people are realizing we need to incorporate the local experts in these plans, rather than do it in a vacuum. We want to take all reasonable measures and advise folks what they can do to prevent or perhaps delay these kinds of incidents from happening,” Digby says.

ESA gave a one-day training course last year at the annual Event Safety Summit in Lititz, Penn., where it’s going to be offered again later this year. ESA is also working with universities to make the course part of their curricula, and will also travel to teach the class. In addition, it’s creating online training resources.

The guide includes experts from all those perspectives, as well as counter-terrorism, to “ensure it’s perpetuating the right ideas.” Digby cites a recent dialogue among the production community about what to do with the lights during a dangerous situation. “That’s probably best asked to those coming into the venue to save our lives. What do the first responders want to see when they come in the venue?” ESA’s preliminary discussions indicate as bright as possible because shooters are indiscriminant, and will shoot into a crowd whether it is dark or light. “By having the lights up, we’ve afforded folks to find exits, take cover, and as importantly, those coming to rescue the ability to see everything in real time vs. also becoming indiscriminant shooters,” Digby adds.

WARPED TOUR VIGILANT SINCE 9/11

Out in the field, “Metal detectors are the new norm,” says Vans Warped Tour founder Kevin Lyman, speaking from Dallas’ Gexa Energy Pavilion, the second date of the 42-date itinerary. In light of the Orlando attack, the Warped Tour, according to Lyman, has been “opening the doors early to have more time for bag checks.”

The largest traveling music festival in the U.S., the Warped Tour also has the distinction of being the longest running after 22 years in North America. Since 1995, the tour gets more than 500,000 attendees annually and is held in



venues from parking lots to fields upon which stages and other structures are constructed prior to and for the duration of the event.

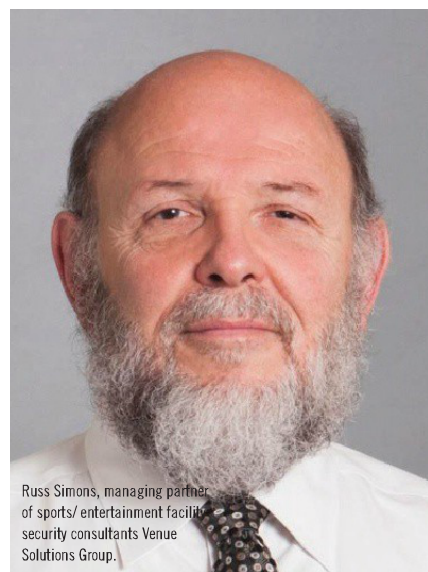
“We have always been vigilant since 9/11,” notes Lyman, who’s on-site at each Warped date. “Venues have added metal detectors today for our first show.”

Scott Carroll, underwriter/broker for the entertainment division of Santa Ana, Calif.-based Taker Insurance, notes his company wants to make sure festivals have adequate security, fencing and security personnel, and medical facilities to treat injured parties, as well as protect property under the festival’s responsibility.

Taker advocates that all festival promoters, producers and any of its venues, touring entertainers or vendors who service these events become part of the Event Safety Alliance and learn from its Event Safety Guide. Taker also encourages festivals attend the Event Safety Summit.

“It’s a must-attend to learn about all things event-related, including heavy education on crowd management from world-renowned experts, who have handled some of the largest crowds at events around the world,” Carroll says.

The range of insurance costs for music festivals can vary dramatically from anywhere between 18 cents per ticket to \$1.50 per ticket sale or greater. Those insurance companies willing to write music festivals will use a number of variables, which include crowd size, prior claims experience, site/safety planning, location, duration and even the type of music in the development of a rate for a music festival, according to Carroll. In addition, the insurance cost is based upon what coverage the event producer would like to obtain for the



festival. Not everyone decides to insure against weather losses or the possibility that a key entertainer will not show up to perform.

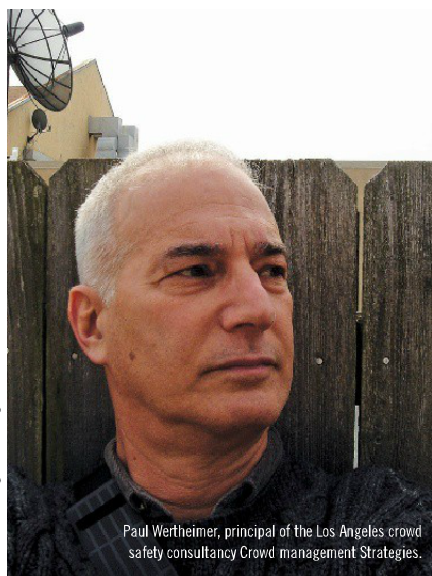
ORLANDO ATTACK EFFECT

Taker’s festival policies aren’t necessarily written based on to what extent security teams are trained to handle violence, “but we certainly give more favorable consideration to those who do,” Carroll notes.

Since the Orlando attack, “we do not see a change in how music festivals have addressed security,” he comments. “Unlike most small clubs or even movie theaters, festivals should already have contingency plans and security measures in place to prevent an incident such as Orlando within reasonable expectations. Entry points generally have armed municipal police, bag checks and even metal detectors used to discourage someone from bringing in a firearm to the festival. A response to an event like Orlando should be built into any festival safety plan and addressed at safety meetings held between the local government, venue and promoter as part of the planning process,” Carroll says.

The best festivals, in Taker’s opinion, will have a well-defined emergency/safety plan in place that is reviewed by anyone working at the event. “While no specific [insurance] discount is given, the more proactive a festival promoter is in outlining their safety plan to the insurance underwriter, the better rate that their insurance broker will be able to obtain,” Carroll says. “The most common mistake is to think ‘it won’t happen’ here,” he adds.

Simons comments: “The major festivals are put on by major companies with a lot of



Paul Wertheimer, principal of the Los Angeles crowd safety consultancy Crowd Management Strategies.

resources and really excellent security talent in their operation, so I'd presume those guys are doing all the right things."

Neither Live Nation nor AEG, the two largest concert promoters, responded to attempts by telephone and email for comment. Simons is not surprised. "I haven't seen either of those

companies talk publicly [about what they're doing security-wise]. They're going to keep elements of their business to themselves," he adds.

ENOUGH BEING DONE?

Not everyone in the industry is convinced that every precaution is being taken by both large and small players.

"This is a gross generalization, but [concert venues and promoters] still hire people who aren't trained. They still understaff. They still have sloppy security, oversell venues, and still fail to protect artists onstage," says Paul Wertheimer, principal of the Los Angeles crowd safety consultancy Crowd Management Strategies, who witnessed the Who concert disaster in 1979 and since then has tracked on a daily basis concert and festival crowd safety incidents, trends and issues worldwide at crowdsafe.com.

"I don't know if [festival organizers] are spending more on metal detectors," Wertheimer admits. "But there's a very high chance [a terrorist attack will occur at a festival] because it's so easy to get weapons or bombs in," he

adds, citing the May 25 T.I. concert at New York's Irving Plaza, where one person was killed and two others injured. In addition, two of the people killed at Pulse in Orlando were underage and should have never been let in the club in the first place, he points out.

"There are good promoters and good venues, don't get me wrong. But there are people with their heads in the sand. They certainly didn't do anything about festivals' standing room or moshing; Kids were getting killed and injured."

Wertheimer believes there aren't mandated "crowd safety and security standards because our industry likes it that way."

Digby disagrees: "There are plenty of standards and codes that already apply to our event space. In the three years we've been beating the bushes about this, the festivals have come a long way. There are many now who implement weather action plans and significant planning processes with response to weather. I think we've made major improvements as an industry. Has everyone taken heed? No. Are we getting there? Absolutely." ■



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