

# Centre security demands a collaborative approach

**GEOFF DONAGHY** SAYS CONFERENCE CENTRES ARE REVISITING THEIR EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS IN THE WAKE OF THE SUSTAINED TERROR THREAT

In a time when security-related issues and incidents are making the headlines on a regular basis, centres have been revisiting both their own emergency preparedness protocols and the changes that are needed in their interactions with third parties, such as communities and clients, in an effort to ensure events are as secure as possible.

A recent survey of AIPC member centres throughout the world has shown increased security concerns among well over half of centre managers, with even higher levels of concern identified on the part of clients. In view of this, more than 80% of centres indicated they had reviewed existing procedures and response teams, with over half taking further specific actions, including new staff training, enhancement of security-related technology, re-engagement with governmental agencies and implementation of new procedures and protocols.

But there's more to it than that.

First, while virtually all centres maintain detailed emergency procedures that address security as a key component, these procedures necessarily involve an active interface with local agencies responsible for overall emergency response actions in order to ensure a well-integrated reaction to any incident that might occur. This means that it's never just a matter for internal policies and procedures but one that must link closely with the rest of the host



community. The result is a requirement for an even higher level of coordination than has often been carried out in the past and, in some cases, the development or enhancement of entirely new relationships. But centre clients have a key role to play as well. New centre protocols often require that a risk assessment be carried out on an individual event basis, for the simple reason that each event has different characteristics and audiences that may dramatically affect the form that risk may take. For example, certain events may attract attention or even active protest simply because of the nature of their subject matter or of the people attending. These are factors that only the organiser can identify with any precision, but they must be communicated early and in detail if the centre and host community are to shape an appropriate security management plan.

There are also lots of variations in terms of the tolerance of organisations and their delegates for the visibility of security measures. While some may welcome such visibility as a clear sign that good security is in place, others may feel that too much profile actually spoils the experience and detracts from the kind of atmosphere most conducive to achieving the goals and outcomes attendees are looking for.

Finally, there is a whole new area of reputational management and business recovery that needs to be considered in destinations that either have or are seen as having potential for security-related incidents. In a time of growing sensitivity toward such incidents, many clients will take the path of least resistance and simply avoid anywhere that they may see as being risky in this respect. Responding to this is, again, a process that requires lots of communication and co-operation not just with potential clients but with other agencies and interests in the destination that have a stake in the outcome.

With the pressures of global competition already requiring a lot of time and energy from centre managers, security issues present yet another demand to be addressed. But as long as such incidents continue to dominate the news, failing to give this area the attention it requires is simply not an option – and a co-operative and communicative approach is really the only way to ensure a successful outcome. ■



**Geoff Donaghy**

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