

[Hybrid Events](#)[Recovery Timeline](#)[Virtual Platforms](#)[Explore](#) 

CORONAVIRUS

Even Smaller Events Will Have Crowd Management Guidelines

BY ANGELA TUPPER

SEPTEMBER 11, 2020

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) just released crowd management guidelines, but what do these add when event occupancy numbers are at an all-time low? Event Safety Alliance VP Steven Adelman insists they're as necessary as ever.



As we predicted, the first events coming back to life are largely small and local — so much so that some are concerned that **the reduced capacity mandated for live events does little more than give planners permission to operate at a loss.**

However, at a time when the challenge of managing a fraction of the normal crowd is not likely a top-of-mind priority for planners, ANSI has released their guidelines for crowd management. A lawyer by profession, Adelman is quick to point out that careful planning does more than prevent emergency situations from turning into full-scale disasters — it also protects against future liabilities.

[Hybrid Events](#)[Recovery Timeline](#)[Virtual Platforms](#)[Explore](#) 

Event planners need to be able to answer for every decision made at each stage of the planning process. Even at a time when some companies are seeing **their capacities reduced by 60 percent or more**, there are still many ways that crowds can be mismanaged.

Compiled from years of expert consultation and research, the ANSI guidelines cover key concerns including ease of egress, wayfinding signage, and standard psychological reactions to emergencies. Each of these factors can have serious ramifications when mismanaged, even at low-capacity events.

How Crowd Management Saves Lives Even at Covid Capacity

Ultimately, crowd management comes down to the art of anticipation: It's not just about anticipating what could go wrong, but how people will respond to potential emergencies. This is an important exercise even when planners are dealing with small crowd numbers.

For example, low crowd density doesn't guarantee that attendees will notice any exits beyond the doorway they initially used to enter the building. If the main entrance becomes blocked during an emergency, obvious wayfinding signage becomes essential to quickly guide them safely to other means of egress.

It's also necessary to consider how new Covid-19 policies could interact with ongoing crowd-management concerns.

“How would planners do an emergency fire evacuation while maintaining social distancing?”

[Hybrid Events](#)[Recovery Timeline](#)[Virtual Platforms](#)[Explore](#)

- **Steven Adelman**, *Vice President, Event Safety Alliance*

While it might seem obvious that the need to escape a burning building would override the risk of infection, people do not always behave rationally when confronted with an emergency.

In fact, Adelman suggests that the most common response is a combination of confusion and under-reaction. He describes this phenomenon as ‘confirmation bias,’ or the tendency to interpret new experiences in ways that match our everyday expectations. In Adelman’s words, “The first hurdle is to recognize an emergency as an emergency. People don’t readily perceive that something is completely different from anything they’ve ever experienced before.”

Despite what Hollywood might have conditioned us to believe, panic is not actually the most common reaction:

“Survival psychologists refer to a ‘10-80-10’ theory: a few people will behave relatively calmly and rationally during a crisis; the great majority will be confused enough to significantly delay or impair their reactions unless they receive help from someone else; the remaining few will panic like we see in movies.”

Crowd Management, pg. 18.

Planners cannot rely on attendees (or even event staff) to think on the spot in an emergency, so it’s important to carefully plan a crisis management strategy in advance. Instructions need to be provided as clearly and concisely as possible so that everyone can switch to auto-pilot mode without compromising safety.

“People in an emergency tend to develop tunnel vision — also tunnel hearing — which means that the things they need to see must be super conspicuous.”

- **Steven Adelman**, *Vice President, Event Safety Alliance*

It’s also imperative to understand how measures put in place to mitigate coronavirus-related risks interact with the established protocol for crowd management. For example, if planners



[Hybrid Events](#) [Recovery Timeline](#) [Virtual Platforms](#) [Explore](#) 

The ANSI guidelines furnish several examples to illustrate how dangerous the impact of human psychology can be. But more to the point, they provide a framework for identifying the potential pitfalls that have led to disasters in the past, in this way helping planners to avoid repeating the same oversights.

IN CONCLUSION

The landscape of the events industry has shifted dramatically in a short period of time, but some fundamental principles remain. ANSI's Crowd Management standards are designed to help bring to the foreground the most important best practices for maintaining crowd safety.

The crowd management standard is not intended to be the last word on every aspect of dealing with crowds; rather, it's the overarching framework that gives planners a way of configuring problems so they can figure out how to mitigate the risks that arise from those problems.

- Steven Adelman, Vice President, Event Safety Alliance

Anyone organizing an event in the near future may need to consult supplemental material with pandemic-specific advice such as the Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide, but ANSI's standards still provide a useful starting place for effective crowd management.

TAGGED WITH

EVENTPROFS	EVENTINDUSTRY	EVENTMANAGEMENT	CORONAVIRUS
------------	---------------	-----------------	-------------

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

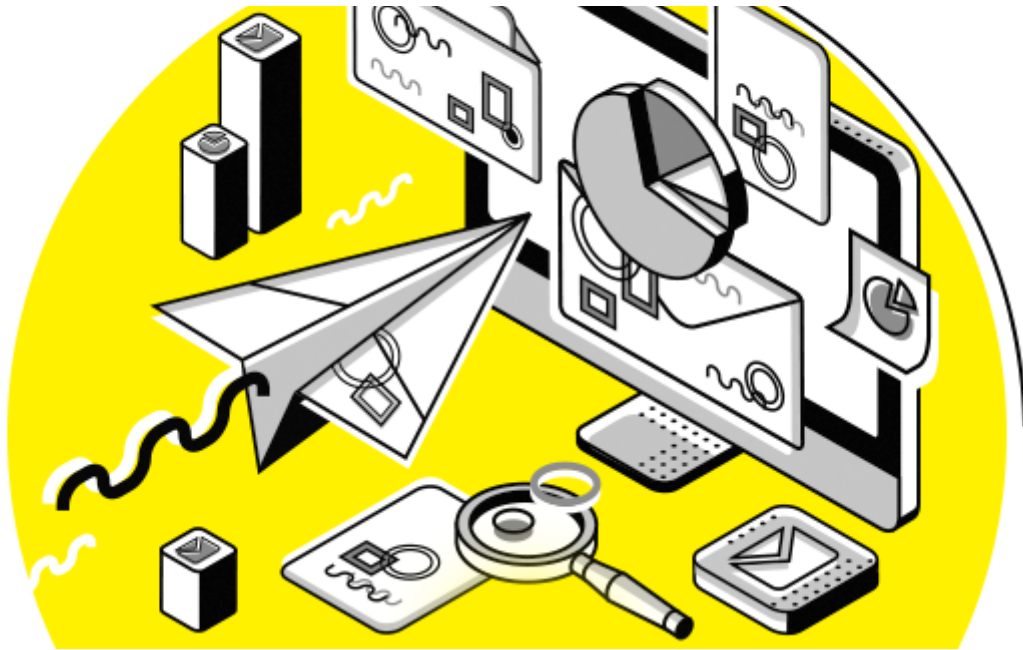


Hybrid Events

Recovery Timeline

Virtual Platforms

Explore 



EV=NT^{MB} + Skift.

The Top News & Research in your Inbox

SUBSCRIBE

Explore

EVENT TECHNOLOGY

EVENT INSPIRATION

EVENT MANAGEMENT



[Hybrid Events](#)

[Recovery Timeline](#)

[Virtual Platforms](#)

[Explore](#)

[FAQ](#)

[CMP](#)

[PRIVACY](#)

[CAREERS](#)

[CONTACT](#)

[ADVERTISE](#)

Resources

[WEBINARS](#)

[EBOOKS](#)

[REVIEWS](#)

[VIDEOS](#)

Stay Connected



© 2020 SKIFT INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



Hybrid Events

Recovery Timeline

Virtual Platforms

Explore



Angela Tupper is a writer and editor based in Toronto, Canada. Her writing for the events industry pairs an interest in current affairs and technology with a background in B2B events, and she has contributed to a range of editorial pieces and research projects in wide distribution. She also holds an MA in English from the University of Toronto.

SEE ALL ARTICLES

What do you think?
3 Responses

Upvote
 Funny
 Love
 Surprised
 Angry
 Sad

0 Comments
 [Event Manager Blog](#)
 [Disqus' Privacy Policy](#)
 [Login](#)

Recommend
 Tweet
 Share
 Sort by Best

Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH
 OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS

Be the first to comment.

[Subscribe](#)
 [Add Disqus to your site](#)
[Add DisqusAdd](#)
 [Do Not Sell My Data](#)