

Planning an event

The organisation of events has long been a method used by charities and not-for-profit organisations for fund-raising and in the main, has proved to be very successful.

However, without adequate planning and organisation, the running of such activities can lead to accidents and injuries. The following is designed to give some insight into the areas to be considered when organising such events, but should not be considered exhaustive.

Legislation

All entertainment events are classed as work activities and therefore are subject to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (2005) and the various regulations passed under it. In addition, licensing legislation may also apply. An event organiser has a duty to ensure that any premises (including grounds or other open spaces), has a means of access and egress, and any plant, equipment and substances are safe and without risks to the health of any employees, volunteers or visitors.

A common duty of care also arises under the Occupiers Liability Act 1995 to ensure that visitors will be reasonably safe in carrying out the activities for which they were invited or permitted to be at the event. Remember that the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) now regard persons who make use of volunteers as employers, and volunteers as employees. The same level of training, information and protection must be provided to both employees and volunteers.

Insurance

The cover provided by most specialist policies is only intended for mainstream fund-raising, such as social activities or events, but not those where there is a high risk of serious injury. If you are planning any event that includes activities of a hazardous nature such as abseiling or bungee jumping then you must notify your insurers and ensure that adequate cover is in place before the event takes place. If outside contractors are employed to provide major attractions, the event organiser should check with the attraction provider that he holds adequate public liability insurance with an indemnity limit not less than that of the organiser's own insurance, and that the event organiser is indemnified as a "principal" under the contractor's policy. A copy of the attraction provider's policy should be obtained. Persons who are not members of your organisation but who are asked to run side shows, such as rides, stalls, displays and the like, should provide their own public liability insurance to cover both property damage and accident or injury to members of the public.

Contractual agreements

You should carefully check any contractual agreements in connection with attraction providers or the hiring of premises or equipment. Despite the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contract Regulations 1995, some conditions observed recently have endeavoured to place onerous responsibilities upon the event organiser, which should have been catered for by the suppliers' own liability insurance.

Communications

There should be clear lines of communication between those involved in organising an event and individuals who should have clearly defined areas of responsibility. If the event is spread over a large site, or over more than one floor of a building, the establishment of a central control point could prove useful, with a specified person to take overall control and with responsibility to summon the emergency services. The location of the nearest accessible telephones should be known, or a fully charged mobile telephone should be provided. Consideration needs to be given as to how the organiser will communicate with the public attending the event, particularly if the event is in the open air.

Planning the venue

Organisers need to consider the suitability of the proposed venue. Whilst the owners of any buildings and land that are used have a responsibility to ensure that their property is safe, it is the organisers who have a primary responsibility for initially choosing venues that are suitable in terms of size and access.

The following need to be considered:

- ❖ Are buildings large enough with sufficient entrances and exits for the numbers anticipated?
- ❖ Are the exits clearly marked?
- ❖ Are sufficient fire extinguishers provided?
- ❖ Do exhibitors or stallholders need to bring in equipment?
- ❖ Are doorways wide enough to accommodate such equipment?
- ❖ Are there awkward steps or corridors to negotiate?
- ❖ Are there sufficient numbers of people to help unload?
- ❖ Will vehicles need to be brought close to the entrance and what are the traffic implications?

The local Fire Prevention Officer should be contacted to ensure that the proposed use is acceptable and that there is no breach of any fire regulations. The owners of the property should confirm that there is no breach of any lease, tenancy or any similar agreement.

Manual handling

A risk assessment must be carried out of all manual-handling tasks. Manual handling must be avoided if at all possible or mechanical handling aids such as trolleys used for moving heavy equipment. If chairs and tables need moving or setting up, there should be sufficient numbers of able-bodied people to assist. The poor handling of loads is one of the major causes of back injuries and permanent disablement. People with a history of back problems should not undertake heavy lifting activities. The erection of temporary staging and lighting gantries must only be undertaken by trained professionals.

Electrical installations

All electrical installations must comply with the Energy (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 (to be commenced by the Minister in 2007) and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007. These must be installed by a recognised authorised and qualified electrical contractor. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 require that all existing electrical installations are inspected and tested annually, that the advice of an inspector or competent person is acted on and defects rectified promptly.

Only electrical contractors enrolled with the Electrical Contractors Safety and Standards Association (ECSSA) or the Register of Electrical Contractors of Ireland (RECI) should be employed. Persons bringing portable electrical appliances onto the site must be able to show that the equipment is correctly maintained and has been subject to routine inspection and testing.

Crowd control

Crowd control is an important factor in accident prevention and attention to detail during the planning stage will assist in a smooth, accident-free event.

Consideration should be given to the following:

- ❖ Parking facilities for both entertainers and visitors.
- ❖ Vehicle and pedestrian entrances and congestion.
- ❖ One-way systems, pressure points, queues etc.
- ❖ Adequate means of escape including checking fire exits are unlocked.
- ❖ Cordoning off of hazardous areas.
- ❖ Provision of adequately trained marshals.
- ❖ Emergency evacuation procedures.
- ❖ Crowds of 5,000 or more will need to be licensed under the Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2001.

First Aid

A risk assessment must be undertaken as to the extent of First Aid provision required. This will be based on the numbers attending and the nature of the activities. Provision may range from a simple First Aid box to a number of trained First Aiders or attendance by St John Ambulance Brigade of Ireland or the Order of Malta Ireland. All marshals and others in control must be made clearly aware of the extent and location of First Aid facilities. An emergency plan must also be in place in the event of someone having to be taken to hospital or needing to receive emergency treatment.

Food and drink

The provision of food and drink at an event may not be considered hazardous by many; however, food poisoning is on the increase, and food hygiene and the requirements of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act 1998 and the European Communities (Hygiene of Foodstuffs) Regulations 2006 must be considered. The FSAI provides guidance notes for training on these requirements. This will include guidance for moveable and/or temporary premises such as marquees, mobile sales vehicles and premises used occasionally for food preparation such as churches and village halls.

Where cooking takes place, a check should be made on the method of heating, i.e. bottled gas, and its associated hazards. Mobile food vans and trailers must not be located where they could be a hazard, or put children at risk from moving traffic. Particular care needs to be taken with deep fat frying.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a major contributor to many serious accidents. If the event features potentially hazardous activities, the sale of alcohol should be restricted or banned altogether.

Animals

If animals feature as part of the event (donkey rides, pet shows, obedience trials, for example), there needs to be adequate separation between the public and the animals, and provision must be made for the welfare of the animals and their separation and supervision. Consideration should be given as to whether visitors (as opposed to competitors or those displaying) should be allowed to bring dogs and how they should be controlled.

Fairground rides

An organiser of a funfair or an owner of fairground equipment shall not make available for use by the public any fairground equipment unless such equipment has a valid certificate of safety in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (section 239).

Cash handling

Consideration must be given before the event to the handling of cash and the security of those involved in collecting and banking money. Every stall or attraction should be provided with a cash box of some kind in which to collect entry charges and payments. A float will be required for each cash collection point at the start of the event and takings must be removed on a regular basis during the course of the event so that large sums of cash do not build up. If admission and other charges are set at a round amount this avoids the need for large amounts of small change. Selling tickets in advance will reduce the amount of cash you have to handle on the day itself. A secure place must be decided upon in advance in which to collect cash and count it prior to banking. A safe should be used to keep cash in overnight before banking the next day. Check with your Insurers that your safe is suitable for the amount you wish to keep. If it is considered safe to do so, you could make use of a bank night safe facility. Ideally, a professional security company should be used to collect cash on the same day. Remember the safety of people is always more important than the protection of money.

Dangerous activities

It is incumbent upon the event organisers to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of participants as far as possible. Many of these activities are operated through Codes of Practice, HSA Guidelines, Trade Association Guidelines, Government Regulations and Health & Safety Authority Guidance Notes.

A check should be made with the operator to establish if such controls exist and if so, that they are followed. Where there is any doubt, the activity should be abandoned. In the event that any dangerous activity is to be organised, your insurer must be advised as public liability cover will not be automatic.

The following is a list of potentially dangerous activities:

- ❖ Rock climbing
- ❖ Abseiling
- ❖ Canoeing
- ❖ Jet-skiing
- ❖ Water-skiing
- ❖ Swimming
- ❖ Pony-trekking
- ❖ Sub-aqua diving
- ❖ Dry slope skiing
- ❖ Clay-pigeon shooting
- ❖ Archery
- ❖ Horse-riding
- ❖ BMX cycling
- ❖ Assault course
- ❖ Barfly jumping
- ❖ Bungee jumping
- ❖ Pole climbing
- ❖ Caving
- ❖ Parachute jumping
- ❖ Ballooning
- ❖ Gliding
- ❖ Flying
- ❖ Driving of any vehicle by persons who would not be allowed to drive such a vehicle on the public highway.

This list is not exhaustive and any other activity which you consider may be dangerous must be notified to your insurers.

Fire safety

Outdoor events come under the scope of The Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2001. A responsible person will be required to ensure that a fire risk assessment is carried out and appropriate fire safety measures put in place.

Licensing

Under Section 231 of the regulations you may be required to apply for a licence. Please refer to your Local Authority.

Further information

Guidance is provided through local authorities