

Presentation to the
Danish Committee on Concert and Festival Safety

Copenhagen, Denmark

By

Paul Wertheimer

Principal

Crowd Management Strategies

Chicago, IL USA

Friday, October 13, 2000

Introduction: Common Cause

Chairman Knudsen, members of the Danish Committee on Concert and Festival Safety, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss with you safety issues and techniques for future Danish festivals and concerts.

I would like to take a moment to explain what Crowd Management Strategies does and some of my professional experiences so that you might better understand the basis upon which I have developed my perspective and opinions.

Crowd Management Strategies, the company I head, specializes in concert and festival crowd research and planning. We are often considered to be at the forefront of international efforts to improve concert and festival crowd safety. The firm advocates the establishment of safety guidelines, standards, laws and public education programs.

To this end, Crowd Management Strategies has developed an assortment of safety tools. These tools include the first database on concert and festival safety issues and incidents; the first worldwide annual report on the state of crowd safety at concerts and festivals; and the first Internet website dedicated to concert and festival crowd safety. In addition, Crowd Management Strategies has published a variety of concert safety guidelines.

I have also worked in the facility management business and assisted several US communities in the development of crowd safety legislation.

Since the early 1990s, I have attended as a concertgoer close to 200 concerts and festivals from Seattle to Amsterdam. I have also spent well over 100 hours in festival seating—standing room space—and moshing environments—where people slam and bump into each other—at concerts and festivals. This has enabled me to observe first hand and to experience first hand what works and does not work in concert and festival crowd environments.

Finally, this meeting today holds a personal irony of sorts for me. Slightly more than twenty years ago, I sat on the other side of a table like this with dedicated citizens, like you. Then, we were trying to make sense of a concert tragedy that claimed the lives of 11 people. That calamity was the December 3, 1979 Who concert tragedy in Cincinnati, Ohio. America's worst rock and roll disaster. The victims of that horrible crowd incident were also crushed to death or injured by forces not unlike those present at the Roskilde Festival's Orange stage.

Now, many eyes are upon you. In Europe and around the world, we all eagerly await your final report. We do so, because we know that your challenges and problems are also our challenges and problems.

Four Points

There are four major points I want to make today.

First, tragedies like the one that occurred at the Roskilde Festival must be viewed in the context of crowd management if Danish music events are to be made safer.

Second, your committee's search for comprehensive industry standards and safety legislation will be a disappointing one. I say this because no one region or country is doing everything right when it comes to safety at concerts and festivals.

Some communities are doing nothing at all. While other communities have begun to address this important need. Britain, for example, has its *Event Safety Guide* for festivals and concerts.

Third, crowd safety laws, standards or guidelines, or a combination of these initiatives, are needed to prevent future Danish concert and festival disorders and tragedies.

Fourth, Danish concert and festival safety can be significantly improved if the inherent dangers of festival seating are addressed. This concert crowd configuration has come to be known as the most dangerous and deadly in rock and roll's 48-year history.

It would be a grave mistake to conclude that, if ignored, the problems associated with festival seating will not haunt future Danish audiences.

Part One: The role of crowd management

When I speak of crowd management, I am not using the term interchangeably with security, or for that matter, crowd control. Security is only a part of crowd management, albeit an important part. While, crowd control is an approach most

often associated with the forced movement or processing of people.

Crowd management, on the other hand, is a strategy that, among other things, strives to provide a safe environment through planning, cooperation and constant management.

Effective crowd management addresses all issues associated with an event, including, but not limited to, risk assessment, event promotion, anticipated crowd behavior, ingress, egress, traffic, public amenities, emergency assistance, first aid, crowd capacity and crowd configurations, artist responsibilities, concessions, public safety, security and the establishment and enforcement of event safety rules.

Part Two: Search for industry crowd management standards

There is no one region or country that has yet addressed all the safety issues surrounding concerts and festivals. Nevertheless, Denmark can find many reasonable crowd safety strategies and techniques in the reports and laws that exist around the world.

The two primary sources for concert crowd safety laws and guidance can be found in Britain and the United States.

In Britain, there is the new *Event Safety Guide*, a unified national approach to providing a consistent level of crowd care. The *Event Safety Guide* was commissioned after the 1988 Monsters of Rock festival crowd crush that killed two concertgoers.

In the US, there are an assortment of legislation, codes and guidance that allow individual communities to maintain reasonable safety at events in their area. But, there are no national standards. A major failing in the US.

Less ambitious undertakings, but still important, have come from other countries around the world. For example, following the 1996 crowd crush death of a teenage girl in Ireland, concert hall management changed its crowd management procedures. The young girl died in a festival seating mosh environment near the front of the stage at Dublin's Point Theatre. The American pop band, The Smashing Pumpkins was performing at the time.

The first document to set forth concert safety procedures known to Crowd Management Strategies, is the Greater London Council's *Code of Practice for Pop Concerts*. That publication followed the 1974 crowd crush of a female teenager at a David Cassidy concert in London. This young fan was crushed near the front of the stage. Many of the council's recommendations remain relevant today, including the caution not to allow "overcrowding ...in any part of the premises" and the need to "exert effective control...in the area in front of the stage."

Official reports addressing concert and festival crowd safety have been issued in other countries, as well. They too are the result of tragedies. They too, come to the conclusion that improved crowd management techniques form the basis of safer events. This has also been the case not only in the US and Europe but in such diverse places as Israel and Hong Kong.

A recent exception may be Belarus. Last year, 53 people, mostly young adults, were crushed to death during a stampede to escape sudden severe weather at an outdoor festival performance by the Russian pop band, Mango Mango in Minsk. The concert was part of an annual beer festival

Rather than undertake an independent investigation, the government quickly blamed the audience for the unparalleled concert disaster.

Part Three: Safety guides, codes and laws that work

Is there a need for new rules and regulations for concerts and festivals? Most definitely.

There are two significant reasons why safety legislation and guides are needed. First of all, concerts and festivals have grown to become major attractions that have increased in number, size and complexity. Second, generally speaking, existing safety laws in most communities do not address the peculiarities of live pop music events.

When I say peculiarities, I mean currently popular activities like crowd surfing (when a person is carried above a crowd), pogoing (jumping up and down in place), moshing, as well as crowd surges, crowd collapses and crushes, and the provocative actions by performers.

Because of these and other safety challenges, the establishment of safety procedures for concerts and festivals is a developing international trend. This is good news.

In Europe, the best example of this new reality, is Britain's *Event Safety Guide*. It's 33 chapters address most of the major concerns of planning and managing festivals and concerts. Without question, it is the best national concert and festival crowd management guide that exists today and I am pleased that some of the recommendations by Crowd Management Strategies were incorporated into the *Guide*.

Nevertheless, not all important issues are covered thoroughly or at all. Here are examples of what I mean.

- There is no discussion of, or guidance, for improving potentially injurious and potentially deadly festival seating.
- There is no discussion or guidance offered for safely managing potentially injurious and deadly moshing environments.
- There is no glossary of special concert and festival safety terms.
- There is no listing of Internet websites that address life safety and crowd safety issues.

In addition, the *Guide* is not made available in CD-ROM or DVD formats.

Mick Upton, Chairman of Britain's ShowSec International, Ltd., a major security and crowd management firm and a contributor to the *Guide*, found the *Guide's* discussion of risk assessment to be disappointingly incomplete. In an issue of *Crowd Management Strategies' crowdsafe* newsletter, Mr. Upton explained:

A common practice is to appoint a safety officer or Health & Safety coordinator to music events. They tend to look at trip hazards and steps and so forth. But the crowd itself is a mystery to them. If a risk assessment on an event is just based on the floor and the surrounding structures, then the most important question of all has not been considered: Who is looking after the crowd?

Having regulations or laws is one thing. The next question that must be asked is: Do they work? In Britain, the *Event Guide* is receiving a positive response even with its shortcomings.

Cincinnati is another example that proves reasonable concert crowd safety laws also work.

Following the *Who* tragedy the citizen task force released a report with more than 100 concert safety recommendations. Many of the recommendations were adopted by Cincinnati legislators and by other local communities across the US. Since the release of this landmark report, Cincinnati has not suffered a situation even close to

the disaster of 1979. Other communities have not been as fortunate.

A more vivid example of how safety laws can and do work comes from Salt Lake City, Utah, a conservative midsized American city like Cincinnati.

Salt Lake City was one of the communities that enacted a ban on festival seating after the Who tragedy. Over the years, city officials ignored the ban. So did local facility operators, promoters, concert security firms and touring artists. Then on January 18, 1991, disaster struck. Three young people—all teenagers—attending an AC-DC hard rock concert at the Salt Palace arena were crushed to death in a festival seating surge toward the front of the stage.

Had the law prohibiting festival seating been enforced rather than ignored, those young people would be alive today.

In the US, the crowd safety standards or laws that do exist for concerts and festivals exist on a community by community basis. Even though in my country we lack needed national standards, many of the laws and codes that do exist, deserve your attention.

They include:

- An event permit for concerts and festivals that includes a detailed written crowd management plan.
- A facility license for concert halls.
- Regulation of festival seating
- Prohibitions on moshing and crowd surfing.

In addition, special legislation giving police and fire undisputed authority in emergencies at concerts and festivals is also in existence. The purpose of this law is to end debates and delays when event organizers or performers question the authority of officials to stop a concert for the purpose of public safety.

Model standards and legislation worthy of this committee's consideration include the festival seating standard passed by the Maryland-based National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in 1994. This professional volunteer organization of more than 65,000 fire safety and life safety professionals develops a broad range of life safety standards that are adopted by many US communities.

The organization's festival seating standard is a milestone because it is the first to give approval to festival seating based on safety criteria. The NFPA standard requires that certain safety precautions be met and, in particular, crowd capacity be reduced when festival seating is to be used. Reducing capacity can in turn help to reduce over all crowd density and discourage crowd surfing and moshing.

Point Four: Festival seating as Russian roulette

The most dangerous aspect of festival seating is that it forces individuals in the crowd to compete against each other for the same prized spaces in front of and around the stage. This competition is sometimes the cause of surges and makes possible crazes (the movement toward something of perceived value) that can in turn result in crushes and crowd collapse.

The same destructive characteristic is encountered in emergencies. Because festival seating crowds lack organization, emergency egress can lead to stampedes (the movement away from a perceived danger) under certain circumstances.

Emergency medical personnel and law enforcement professionals in search of victims or troublemakers face a similar challenge. In their case, the problem is penetrating the crowd to reach their destination in a timely manner without the benefit of aisles.

Students of crowd management will tell you that safety is diminished when people in a crowd or queue compete against each other. They will also tell you that crucial to a safe crowd environment and movement of people is the pursuit of common goals, not the fostering of potential conflict. The competitive nature of festival seating is its the fatal flaw.

While many festival seating environments occur without major incidents, the elements of disorder and confusion are always present in the standing room mass assembly.

When you add the mosh phenomenon (with its crowd surfing, stage diving, surges and crushes) to festival seating, you have what I called in 1993, using American vernacular, the “double whammy.” That is, a potentially deadly situation brought about by the introduction of two dangerous triggers of disorder—unmanaged festival seating and moshing.

This is one reason why festival seating where volatile performances or performers are anticipated, presents the challenge of greater, not less or normal, care to protect the public.

Festival seating is not only a problem in the US, it is a worldwide concert issue.

Recent disasters in Europe make this point. Before the Roskilde Festival there was last year's Swedish Hultsfred Festival crowd crush that killed one young woman near the stage during a performance by the American band Hole. In 1997, another young girl died in a crowd at a concert in Germany by local stars Die Toten Hosen.

ShowSec's Mick Upton touched on the extreme dangers of festival seating in his paper, "Crowd Management and Risk Assessment":

Pit teams [stage barrier security] must be trained to extract people from the crowd within 3 minutes if serious incidents are to be avoided.

What is Mr. Upton telling us about festival seating?

He is telling us, something very scary. Something that the average concertgoer does not comprehend. In an extreme crowd crush situation, one's chances of surviving without injury, if at all, may be determined in a matter of 180 seconds.

Festival seating environments have long generated criticisms. In a 1991 editorial,

the entertainment industry publication *Billboard*, made its position clear:

We hope every state, if not the federal government itself, outlaws festival seating. Until that happens, promoters and venues ought to reconsider this practice.

The largest US organization of parents and school teachers, the 6.5 million-member National PTA organization, also called for a halt to festival seating. The organization passed a resolution in 1992 that concluded:

The practice of selling admission tickets to rock concerts that allows the ticketholder the privilege to stand in a space, called festival seating, is known to create an unsafe environment for ticketholders who are primarily children and youth...

The bottom line is this: Festival seating as it is used today in Denmark should be revised. At the very least, more precautions and staffing, not less, are needed when festival seating is used.

Recommendations by Crowd Management Strategies

Besides the guidelines and recommendations found in European and American studies, there are other crowd safety issues that deserve the attention of the Danish

Committee on Concert and Festival Safety.

Responsibility and authority at events

The responsibilities and authorities of event organizers, public safety officials, private security, medical staffs, performers and others in normal and emergency situations should be clarified in writing along with any penalties for not complying.

Performers and their agents (for example, tour managers, tour security and production managers) have a special role in crowd safety. Performers in particular can have extraordinary influence over an audience. While agents of performers can provide invaluable assistance or detrimental interference in an emergency situation. That is why the responsibilities of performers and their agents and any corresponding penalties should be clarified and attached as a rider to their performance contracts.

Capacity expectation/limitations

There can reach a critical crowd mass that once surpassed, puts the safety of individuals and the crowd as a whole at risk. This is especially true where festival seating is the crowd configuration, the event is free to the public, and performers have a history of inciting their audiences, or a portion of the audience is anticipated to be prone toward rowdiness or violence. For these reasons and others mentioned earlier, crowd capacities should be limited in size even at outdoor events. This includes setting limits for concert events within festivals.

There is another very important reason to limit crowd size. Only by setting a capacity

limit for all concerts and events can effective crowd management plans and staffing be developed and sufficient services provided.

Security standards

Certified security training, licensing or both should be required of all concert and festival staff or security/stewards that deal directly or oversee the management of crowds at festivals and concerts.

Alcohol management

Today, more than ever before, alcohol consumption is a major part of public assembly events. This is true at concerts and festivals where breweries and distilleries have become major sponsors of concert tours and festivals. This new reality is a particular problem at all-day events or where festival seating, moshing, crowd surfing and other risky activities are likely to occur. And while the drinking customs vary around the world, the affect drinking has on our moods, mental acuity and physical dexterity is well documented.

Event organizers know the introduction of alcohol increases the risk of injuries, disorder and lawsuits. This point was made in a major 1991 survey by the California-based company Event Risk Management.

The firm surveyed 578 event professionals in the US and Canada on the subject of leading event risks. Four hundred responded.

Seventy percent of the respondents listed the “sale and consumption of alcohol” as the leading risk factor that they had to address. Other “concerns or risk factors” listed in the order they appeared in the survey may also interest this committee.

They are:

- 2) Size of crowds
- 3) Over-capacity crowds
- 4) Inexperienced organizers
- 5) Poor communication
- 6) Inexperienced security
- 7) Dangerous or hazardous activities
- 8) Weather conditions
- 9) No evacuation plan
- 10) Free and uncontrolled admission
- 11) Slow emergency response
- 12) Location not designed for events

Medical event services

The British *Event Safety Guide* speaks to the need for appropriate medical services at festivals. The Cincinnati task force report also addresses this need and makes eight recommendations.

Emergency medical services became an issue following the Who concert tragedy when investigative news reports found that the lack of on-site emergency medical

care may have cost unnecessary loss of life.

That was the claim by emergency medical personnel on site at the Who concert.

According to a 1980 investigative story in the Cincinnati Post:

A private ambulance at the Dec. 3 Who concert where 11 persons died was not equipped to provide oxygen to a critically injured concertgoer.

An emergency medical technician said his attempts to drive the victim to a hospital were stymied when keys to the ambulance could not be found.

"I was crying. I was so frustrated," said former National Medic Service employee Joyce Grubbs, one of two paramedics working on [the victim]. "We got down to the ambulance, and there was no hookups, connections and no keys. We gave it our very best shot, but we had nothing to work with."

Public crowd safety education

How do people learn about crowd safety? If they have learned anything at all, it usually is by experience. A bad experience.

A public education program on crowd safety is needed for the general public. Both

the government and the Danish concert industry could have roles to play in this effort.

The industry, at the very least, should produce crowd safety programs that not only warn about potential dangers and discomforts, but also offer solutions. The education program could be accomplished through advertising, free distribution of safety rules, posting of venue rules, enforcement of rules and appropriate event signage.

In addition, event organizers and artists should use their websites to list all rules and safety tips for ticketholders and fans.

In 1998, Crowd Management Strategies developed a list of the items that event organizers and promoters were encouraged to include on their websites. Our recommendations included posting information on:

- Venue rules and policies
- Ingress/egress locations, first aid rooms, door openings, etc.
- Special services for the disabled, elderly and children
- Prohibited items and crowd activities and penalties
- Updates on performance schedule changes, traffic and weather
- Information and maps on emergency situations
- Anticipated sound/noise level inside the concert site

Injury reporting

Government authorities should require that both first aid data and arrest information be placed in the public record. In this way, music fans, parents, medical professionals, crowd safety consultants, safety and law enforcement officials and legislators will be able to better judge the safety of events in their communities. Event organizers, artists and contract staff with the best safety records will also receive the credit they deserve.

Youth pop culture

Much of the concert scene today is greatly influenced by international youth pop culture and the international concert industry. In other words, concert production and concert pop culture are not provincial products, as we might want to think. Both grow less parochial and more international each year. The committee cannot dismiss this overwhelming influence if an understanding is to be gained on why audiences, performers and organizers act as they do.

Danish youth pop culture, like Western counterparts, is heavily layered with international influences coming from innumerable sources. Perhaps, the most pervasive, if not influential, is America's Music Television (MTV). The images, music, opinions, and news it carries reach more than 350 million households in 139 territories and countries, including Denmark.

MTV is not the only influence. There are many persuasive influences inundating

young people—including children—coming from too many sources to list. Take for instance, a recent catalogue by the toy maker Lego. The cover picture is an easily discernable miniature Lego character crowd surfing down the bleachers of an outdoor stadium. What does that communicate to youngsters? In my view, it says crowd surfing is hip, fun and cutting edge.

My point is this: Understanding how popular youth values and mannerisms are born, promoted and perpetuated will help lead us to the design of more effective crowd safety techniques for events that young people and adults attend.

Conclusion: Lasting Legacies

The committee report that you submit will be one of the legacies of the Roskilde Festival and Pearl Jam concert tragedy. Creating a new standard for festival and concert crowd safety in Denmark will mark the first positive action to come from the tragedy of June 30 and perhaps the most lasting. No matter what you recommend, your work will impact safety at rock concerts and festivals well past the Danish border.

Even so, the lessons of this tragedy should not end there. Too often, when a concert tragedy occurs in the respective country, some people and special interest groups are eager to remove evidence of the incident. I am not suggesting that this is the case in Denmark. But, historically it is the case.

Usually, the push comes from the concert industry. They are eager to erase the

embarrassment. To ignore lessons learned. Quick to trivialize loss of life, injuries and property damage.

Time and again, this approach also has proven to be a costly mistake. It has led us to live by what I call the Santyana Principle. In other words, failing to learn the lessons of the past condemns us to repeat our errors.

All of us—music fans, youth pop culture media, safety officials, parents and political leaders—need to remember our mistakes, not hide them if we are to find remedies.

That is why beyond needed safety standards, guidelines or laws, there is another action I believe this committee should consider or pass to an appropriate agency. It too could influence the safety and enjoyment of future festivals in Denmark.

I propose that somewhere on the site of the Roskilde Festival a special space or mobile structure for travel to other Danish concerts and festivals be developed in remembrance of all of the victims of June 30. This memorial could also serve a very important public education role by reminding future Danish festivalgoers of their role in helping protect not only their safety in crowds, but the safety of those around them.

Thank you for extending to me the opportunity to speak before the Danish Committee on Concert and Festival Safety. I wish you success in your mission.

Documents Supplied to Danish Committee on Concert and Festival Safety

1. J. J. Fruin, "The Causes and Prevention of Crowd Disasters," Engineering For Crowd Safety, Edited Roderick A. Smith and Jim F. Dickie, (Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1993), pp. 99-108.
2. Jake Pauls, CPE, "Life Safety Evaluation: What is it? How is it Used? How is it Misused?" presented at the National Fire Protection Association Fall Meeting, 1996.
3. Anthony DeBarros, "Concertgoers push injuries to high levels," USA Today, Vienna, Virginia, August 8, 2000), p.1D-2D.
4. Alexander Berlonghi, "Risk Analysis for Special Events," Engineering For Crowd Safety, Edited by Roderick A. Smith and Jim F. Dickie, (Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1993), pp. 239-247.
5. Crowd Management Strategies, Mosher-Friendly Guidelines, (Chicago, 2000).
6. "Britain Updates Its Concert Guide," Crowdsafe (Crowd Management Strategies, November/December 1999), pp. 3-4.
7. Paul Wertheimer, "Legacy Of December 3: Crowd Management Comes Of Age," Crowdsafe (Crowd Management Strategies, November/December 1999), pp. 3-4.
8. Crowd Management Strategies, You and the Crowd (Chicago, 2000).
9. Paul Wertheimer, Crowd Management: Report of the Cincinnati Task Force on Crowd Control and Safety (with survey), City of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, Ohio, July 8, 1980).
10. National Fire Protection Association, NFPA 101: Life Safety Code (Quincy, Massachusetts, 2000).