

5 Practising health and safety in student delivered events

Brianna Wyatt, Giulia Rossetti and Alan McBlane

Abstract

For future event success, event management students must understand health and safety, and manage risks through strategic proactive measures including risk assessment and adhering to legal frameworks. This chapter offers a series of music festival case studies that are used to support the health and safety related lecture content and experiential seminar activities for second-year undergraduate events management students. Event management theory framing the lecture content is included, as well as a discussion of pedagogical theories relating to engagement and inclusivity underpinning the seminar activities. Teaching notes outlining the practical delivery of the health and safety lessons support this chapter.

Subjects: Event planning; health and safety; risk assessment; risk management; experiential learning

Introduction

Because events are people-centred experiences, health and safety considerations must be made priority. The management of health and safety for events must aim to “ensure that all participants and attendees, as well as those affected by an event, are protected from threats to their health and safety” (Getz & Page, 2020, p. 373). Within this, risk management is key, and should be thoroughly embedded in an event’s planning, design, and delivery activities to ensure any risks are effectively managed to avoid unwanted consequences (Silvers & O’Toole, 2021). As risk is the possibility of something happening, it can technically result in either positive or negative outcomes. However, it is more often associated with negative outcomes, including injury, damage, disaster, or loss. As such, within the events industry, risk is commonly referred to as “any condition or occurrence that might affect the outcomes of an event or event activity and might expose an event organisation to loss measured in terms of probability and consequences” (Silvers & O’Toole, 2021, p. 4).

Controlling risk requires strategic planning and an understanding of what is needed to make the event a safe experience. However, because risk is something that ‘might’ happen, uncertainty can pose planning challenges. Thus, from the onset event organisers must assess all possible hazards and risks and their potential consequences, and then plan appropriately for risk management. In most cases event organisers are able to control risk through risk management strategies: avoidance (the risk is prevented); reduction (the severity of the risk is lowered); diffusion (risk is spread out to lessen immediate impact); reallocation (risk is transferred to another party through contracts or waivers) (Getz & Page, 2020). However, the cases outlined below demonstrate the consequences of poorly planned events that failed to provide the necessary provisions for a safe experience, and essentially failed to enforce a health and safety policy and/or risk management.

Case 1: Fyre Festival (2017) - Poor planning and inadequate provisions

In 2017, what was meant to be a luxury music festival in the Bahamas for wealthy elites and Instagram influencers became the epitome of ‘what not to do’ in event planning. While there are a wide range of issues that led to the epic failure of Fyre Festival, including false advertisement, unfulfilled promises, and inadequate funds, the lack of health and safety planning was perhaps the most notable upon reflection. Issues identified in the 2019 Netflix documentary *Fyre: The greatest party that never happened* and subsequent news reports included lacking accommodation for both attendees and staff, lacking security and senior management, dangerous location due to shark infested waters and swarming sand flies, lacking water, inadequate food supply, and lacking sewage facilities. *Billboard* reported attendees arrived at a half-built location with no communication, a limited number of disaster relief tents, and no way of leaving due to flight cancellations (Kaufman, 2017). Complicating the matter, only one ambulance was arranged to be on-site, attendees were robbed of their personal belongings, and the National Event Services – an emergency medical services company – arrived to find the accommodations provided were uninhabitable from bug infestation and blood-stained mattresses (Kaufman, 2017). This left the Fyre Festival experience in a state of chaos that has been described by attendees on social media as a real life version of *Lord of the Flies* – a novel about how a group of boys turn to violence for survival after becoming stranded on a deserted island. Despite not having purchased cancellation insurance, a day into the scheduled festival, and amid a storm-induced flood leaving the already poor conditions in a state of emergency, the festival organisers finally decided to cancel the event stating “*due to circumstances out of our control, the physical infrastructure was not in place on time and we are unable to fulfil on that vision safely and enjoyably for our guests*” (Kaufman, 2017).

Given the extent of failures and the organisers’ reckless disregard for the health and safety of their attendees and staff, which resulted in numerous class action lawsuits regarding their breach of contracts, negligence, wire fraud, and deception, this case is perhaps the epitome of poor health and safety planning. It therefore offers events management students an in-depth look at the consequences of poor health and safety planning, and even general event planning. In review of