

**DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL EVENTS:**

# **A Guide to Mitigating Health & Safety Risks**

**16 QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ASK TO  
CREATE AN EFFECTIVE EVENT RISK  
MITIGATION STRATEGY**



**Blerter**

# INTRODUCTION

Whatever type of event you're planning – board meeting, music festival, conference, sports or community event – you need an effective risk mitigation strategy in place.

Your event will involve health and safety risks and some of them will be unavoidable. So, let's talk about how to get to that happy place where your event's risks are minimized and you have a robust plan for dealing with any risk-related incidents.

## MITIGATION?

Before we dive in it might pay to be clear on what we're talking about. As you'll see, mitigating risk is part of a broader risk management strategy and in this guide we focus on health and safety risks. (Note: there are other areas of risk you need to address like security, brand, financial and regulatory risk, etc., which are related but not our focus here).

According to [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) mitigation is “the act of making a condition or consequence less severe”. And this guide is designed to help you minimize the chance and consequence of adverse incidents.

## THE CONTEXT:

### Risk Management Strategy Planning

You can't develop an effective risk mitigation strategy without first establishing what potential health and safety hazards and dangers your staff and attendees will be exposed to.

Drawing on [eventeducation.com](https://www.eventeducation.com)'s six step process there are a number of questions to answer here:



## **01** Have you established who is responsible for risk management planning?

For many events this is just another item on your to-do list as the event planner. But larger events might have a committee, a designated risk manager or a consultant specifically tasked with minimizing risk to your attendees' health and safety. Whatever the nature of your event and the human resources at your disposal, someone must own risk management.

## **02** Have you identified any elements of your event that involve hazards to the health and safety of your attendees?

This requires systematic identification of all health and safety risks with help from stakeholders, service providers and your team.

- Talk to the venue team about anything that you need to be aware of – low doors, potentially slippery floors, swampy areas, badly lit areas, potential traffic hazards, etc.
- Engage with city council officials, law enforcement, emergency services and specialist providers about risks associated to your event's location – traffic hazards, access issues, dangerous corners on the race course, wildlife factors, etc.
- Consult with sport experts and professionals if you're running a sporting event to understand risks associated with the sport as they apply to your event – course characteristics, common injuries, inherent risks in the sport, etc.
- Talk to your suppliers and involved third parties – caterers, sound and light system providers, stall holders, exhibitors, fireworks and pyrotechnics people, performers – about potential risks associated with their involvement.

**03**

**Have you identified the specific hazards and chances for injury associated with all the elements of your event?**

This is the result you're looking for from all the investigation and consultation you undertook in step one.

IDENTITY  
HAZARD

**04**

**Have you determined the possibility of adverse incidents and the severity of their consequences?**

The need to answer this question should inform and guide you in all your investigation and consultation with stakeholders and experts.

CONSEQUENCES  
INCIDENTS



## 05

Have you prioritized the identified risks according to the probability they will eventuate and the degree of impact they could have?

This is key to effectively mitigating risks since it informs your response to identified risks and your overarching incident management process. You might want to employ a risk evaluation matrix here to help you prioritize.

RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX				
SEVERITY \ PROBABILITY	Catastrophic (1)	Critical (2)	Marginal (3)	Negligible (4)
Frequent (A)	High	High	Serious	Medium
Probable (B)	High	High	Serious	Medium
Occasional (C)	High	Serious	Medium	Low
Remote (D)	Serious	Medium	Medium	Low
Improbable (E)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
Eliminated (F)	Eliminated			

Image courtesy of V-Comply

## 06

Have you developed strategies for risk mitigation and response based on the first four steps of your risk management process?

You'll need to decide how to manage incidents as indicated by the prioritized list of risks you have developed through the first four steps of the risk management process.

## 07

Have you made plans for monitoring risks and revising responses if the profile of the risk changes?

This is key to managing risk during the event because you need to be able to adjust your response and activate it as your monitoring indicates.

# CASE STUDY

Let's follow through this process using an example of a risk associated with an event hazard.

## EVENT

A long distance cycle race.

## HOW DID WE MANAGE THAT RISK?

### Responsibility

You have a small risk management team which includes an experienced race director who sets the course and is responsible for the safety of the riders.

### Hazard Identification

Your race director informs you there is a very real risk of riders falling off their bikes as they round a tight corner at the bottom of a long hill where they will have picked up significant speed. A risk that will be heightened in the event of rain or a bunch of riders trying to negotiate the corner.

### Risk Identification

You determine that there is a serious risk of injury to riders who fall off given the speed involved.

### Risk Evaluation

Based on previous races, and advice from experienced riders and your race director, you determine that it's likely inexperienced riders, in particular, could fall on the corner. You quantify this by saying that 1 in 40 riders could fall and that this could increase to as many as 1 in 20 if the corner is wet.

## HAZARD

A tight corner at the bottom of a hill in a cycle race.

And - given the potential for injuries ranging from grazes to broken bones or, even, head injuries and other serious injuries – you determine that this risk could have significant consequences.

### Risk mitigation

You decide you must ensure that the road service is oil free, riders have maximum room to go around the corner; a road sign should be padded, hay bales should be positioned to soften falls, a paramedic, or medically trained volunteer is on hand, particular mention is made of the corner in briefings for event crew and riders, and an alternative route excluding the corner is scoped out for particularly wet conditions.

**Risk monitoring:** You position an experienced crew member or volunteer at the corner to assess the state of the corner throughout the day, keep you updated on how well riders are handling the corner and supervise any changes to your mitigation measures, including rerouting the race if conditions demand it.



# Risk Mitigation Strategies

So, you've identified, assessed, evaluated and prioritized your risks into a list of issues or mapped them out in a matrix. Now what? It's time to determine how to deal with the identified risks using one of four recognized strategies.

## **08** Can you just accept the risk?

Hazards with low impact associated risks that are extremely unlikely may be acceptable and you may decide to take no action. Whether you make that choice will also depend on how practicable mitigating the risk will be. Dancing might be considered inherently risky, for instance – we've all seen how wrong things can go on a dancefloor on Youtube or Funniest Home Videos – but you might accept that risk for a concert or dinner dance because it's intrinsic to the experience you're offering.

## **09** Can you avoid the risk?

Risks that are highly probable and high impact may have to be avoided if they can be. Indeed, if the risk is significant enough, it might make it impossible to have your event or require rescheduling of elements or activities.

For example, an electrical storm or tornado warning might cause a day / round of a golf tournament to be cancelled. We might decide that our tight corner on our cycle race is too dangerous in the wet and go to a different course configuration in the case of rain. The strength of the wind might mean the high wire act can't perform, or the ski jumpers can't jump.

Unfortunately, avoiding risk might sometimes mean losing elements of your event when the associated risks are simply too high. But remember, it's better to be safe than sorry.

# 10

## Can you limit the risk?

There may be steps you can take to reduce the likelihood of an incident. For instance, limiting a wet floor risk might be as simple as having a “Wet Floor” sign on hand or, if practicable, a volunteer with a supply of dry towels standing by. Maybe, planks can be laid across a wet section of a path or a handrail provided.

# 11

## Can you transfer the risk?

Maybe it's best to let someone else handle the risk, particularly if it's related to specific expertise. For instance, you wouldn't expect untrained volunteers to deal with medical emergencies. You'd employ a medical team or ensure paramedics were on site.

## Worth

## Remembering

Some risks are transferred and mitigated when you employ the right suppliers. A good caterer will cover off the risk of food poisoning and a good amusement ride provider will cover off the ride's health and safety requirements.





# Prepare Your Team

You've identified risks and formulated a plan for dealing with them, but let's look a little deeper into actions you and your team might need to take to mitigate risks. There are more questions to be answered to help ensure you've done what you need to do before, during and after your event.

## 12

### Have you made sure your broader team is trained to deal with risk?

Everyone involved in your event should have the knowledge and skills to deal with adverse events. They may not need to know every aspect of your risk management plan, but they must know how to deal with risks they will be responsible for. Volunteers manning an aid station in a remote part of an endurance race should, for instance, know first aid and could be trained to recognize signs of fatigue beyond acceptable levels, dehydration, hypothermia, etc.

## NOTE

You may have transferred risk to a supplier or third party, but you shouldn't just assume their staff are properly trained. You need to confirm their training and make sure they understand their role and responsibilities in the broader risk management plan. They should be involved in all relevant briefings.

# Training and Communication Challenge

Your broader team could mean a lot of people. [Sport NZ](#) offers a very useful but daunting list of “people you might need to consult and communicate with” to mitigate risks in an event in their excellent guide to event risk management, which we have modified slightly:

- Senior management of the organization staging the event
- Event sponsors
- Event employees
- Event suppliers
- Relevant authority (such as the local and/or regional councils, state and federal authorities)
- Participants (such as contestants, exhibitors, performers or racers)
- Event officials
- Event volunteers
- Spectators
- Members of the public
- Agencies responsible for relevant streets and highways
- Police
- Local emergency services (such as Ambulance, Fire, Coastguard Unit or Surf Life Saving Club)
- Risk management and/or safety professionals

# 13

## Have you told your team who to report adverse incidents to?

Your plan will tell you who owns a hazard / risk. But your team needs to know who to communicate with in the event of an accident or risk-related injury. And you need a clear process for alerting the broader team and making related changes. For example, the person responsible for our earlier case study's troublesome corner needs to know who to inform if the decision is made to reroute the race after an accident.

# 14

## Will your team be equipped with the tools they need to manage risk?

A wet floor might be easily fixed with a dry towel or mop, but the person monitoring the risk needs to know where to find what they need to deal with it. Forgetting to provide the towels or mop they need – easily overlooked while working through a long checklist for an event – could slow your response meaning the risk exists for longer.

## Nightmare

### Scenario

While the team member charged with monitoring the potential slipping hazard runs off to find the warning sign and something to dry the floor with, an elderly person slips and breaks their hip.

COMMUNICATION

## **15** Do your team members have the communication tools they need?

As we have seen, there are a lot of people that might need to be in the loop when it comes to risk. You need to be consulting with stakeholders right from the start of this process. It's one thing that team members know who to report incidents to and organize responses with, but it won't be much use if they can't contact them easily.

During the event, it's imperative that people know what they need to know as quickly as possible. A delay, while the link is made between the communication system one team is using and the system the people needed to respond are using, could be critical or even life-threatening.

In short: best-practice here is having your broader event team on one communications platform so that alerting people who need to know about an incident is easy.

## **16** Are you collecting the information you need to do better next time?

Monitoring risks should extend into monitoring your risk mitigation measures and response. You need a system for recording what worked and what needs improvement for this event and others.

COLLECTED INFORMATION

# Communication is key & technology is the answer

By now you have a pretty clear idea of all the factors involved in developing an effective risk mitigation strategy.

It's worth stressing the glue that holds any successful strategy together though. Without good, efficient communication you don't have an effective way to mitigate risks and manage associated incidents. That's why the answer to question 15 is critical.

At Blerter we're all about providing you with communication and coordination tools that make managing events and risk-related incidents easy.

That's why we urge you to look beyond traditional communication tools like the walkie talkie and cell phone – it often isn't possible to put all stakeholders on a walkie talkie and verbal communication is often insufficient. Event software and smartphone apps make dealing with risk so much easier.

**Trust us. The time spent finding the right communication technology for your event is time well spent. Start the process now by checking out what Blerter can do to help.**

[Check Out the App](#)

