

Security Guards & Safety at Events

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1st July 2026

I have lost count of the concerts where someone climbed a delay tower in front of the stage and started dancing on top of it. Same goes for the big tops at festivals, people up on the canvas, because from below it looked like a laugh.

It looks like fun from the crowd. From where I stand it is a person twelve metres up an aluminium structure that was never built to hold them, in front of thousands of people, with a live show running. So you stop the show. You get the comms going. And then you find out how hard it actually is to get someone down off a tower when they do not want to come down. It is a height recovery job at that point, with a crowd watching and a band waiting in the wings.

Here is the part that matters. Every one of those events had security. Most of them had a security ratio signed off by someone. One guard per hundred patrons, or one per one hundred and fifty if the police were feeling generous. Numbers on a page. Boxes ticked.

None of that placed a single person watching those towers. None of it read the crowd that was feeding someone up onto one, the energy at the front that a flow plan would have clocked an hour earlier.

This is the thing the industry keeps getting wrong, and it costs people. We treat security as a line item. We allocate a budget, we hand the whole thing to a security company, and we tell ourselves it is handled. Then we go one step further and fold crowd management into the same brief, as if they are the same job.

They are not the same job.

Security is threat and response. Access control, asset protection, who goes where, how you escalate when something goes wrong. Crowd management is movement, density, flow and behaviour. How people move through the space, how it feels, whether it stays comfortable enough that nobody panics. People do not panic without a reason, and the usual reason is that the space stopped feeling safe well before anyone noticed.

A static guard on a gate is not a crowd manager. A steward walking a queue is not security. Different skills, different training, different planning, often different contractors. Bundle them into one line and hand them to the wrong provider and you have built the gap before the gates even open.

And the ratio makes it worse, because it gives people permission to stop thinking. Five thousand people on a flat open park for a family day is not the same job as five thousand people on a waterfront site running to 02:00 with a bar open. Same headcount. Completely different risk. If you take the ratio and multiply it out and call that your plan, you have not planned anything. You have done arithmetic.

So here is what I would do, and what I wish more people did.

Finish the thinking before you spend a dollar. Sit down with the site plan first. Where are the access points, the pinch points, the assets someone might climb, the blind spots, the dark corners. Where does control sit and can it see what it needs to see. Work out what you are

defending against and how people are going to move, and only then work out how many bodies you need and where they stand.

Staff to the risk, not the shift. Your risk profile changes through the day. Ten on the gate at doors does not mean ten on the gate at 22:00. Move people as the risk moves, and re-brief them every time you move them, because a bag checker redeployed to crowd flow without a fresh brief is just a confused person in hi-vis.

And the test I come back to every time. If your security plan cannot answer who decides what and when, it is not a plan. It is a purchase order with good intentions attached.

The tower was never really a security failure. The guards were where the sheet told them to be. It was a planning failure that security got the blame for, because nobody upstream did the thinking, separated the two jobs, and asked who was actually watching the thing someone was always going to climb.

Count guards last. Think first.