

# 3 Best Practices to Ensure Public Safety at Large-scale Events

How improving communication and coordination across public sector agencies and organizations can better secure special events.

Successfully orchestrating public safety at large-scale events now comes with new challenges stemming from a stark increase in multifaceted and unpredictable crises and threats.

Whether it's a massive sporting event such as the U.S. Super Bowl and FIFA World Cup, high-stakes global summits like the UN General Assembly, or convention-style gatherings like the annual Consumer Electronics Show, risks associated with these types of high-profile events are more complex than ever.

The one priority they all share is the need to protect attendees—spectators, conference registrants, heads of state, athletes, media etc.—as well as the public infrastructure and personnel that facilitate them. This is no small feat. Yet, it's one that public sector agencies and organizations must ensure they can effectively tackle.

### The challenges of securing COP26

**COP26**, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, has a staggering roster of international heads of state, politicians and journalists, and is staffed by a large number of personnel. Add to that significant media attention and interest from both public and private organizations around the world, and those responsible for safeguarding the event and its attendees face a multitude of challenges, including:

- Events that impact public safety and infrastructure
- The possibility of cyber attacks on the host city
- The risk of a COVID-19 outbreak



# Formalize Cross-agency Communications

Public safety concerns at large-scale events are unique and require expert coordination across public and private organizations. Often, multiple government agencies—at the national, state and local level—as well as security teams manage different aspects of an event's public safety strategy.

While this allows for broader coverage, the intersection of multiple agencies requires a clear communications framework—which is often lacking and can lead to poor public safety outcomes. The key is to develop an official line of communication supported by a structured process and informed by the best available information. This coordination and communication work best when each party has a designated point of contact. Together, these enable:

- Proactive planning for the tools and data sources needed to ensure information symmetry between agencies, reducing time spent comparing data
- Balanced and streamlined flows of information that prevent lags and delays in critical responses times
- Coordination across departments, agencies and organizations to eliminate duplicative efforts
- More transparency in critical, high-stakes moments that enables faster response times

As public safety challenges often emerge beyond the physical borders of large-scale events, it's imperative that agencies' communication and coordination are informed by relevant real-time information. They need to know what's happening in and around the venue they're protecting, and they need to know as soon as an incident occurs.

This is especially true for large sporting events as they tend to be convergence points for macro issues like human trafficking, disease outbreaks and other high-stakes incidents. They require complex and coordinated responses, which can be actioned in real time when agencies' have an early line of sight into emerging incidents.

Take, for instance, the 2022 U.S. Super Bowl, held in Los Angeles, California. Nearly 10 different departments and organizations, both public and private, were responsible for ensuring the safety of those in and outside the stadium. Many relied on **First Alert**—Dataminr's product for the public sector—to get the earliest indication of breaking news events. They then assessed this information—delivered via real-time alerts—and determined what, if any, actions were needed.

**Dataminr's [First Alert](#) product delivers real-time, breaking news alerts on high-impact events to global, national, state and local first responders and emergency management teams. Public safety teams can use it to stay abreast of the context surrounding an event.**

The goal was to avoid any circular reporting and ensure all parties knew what to do with the real-time alerts they received.

## Establish a Core Planning Group

Proper preparation is critical to a successful public safety plan. Before taking on the responsibility of safeguarding any large-scale events, the various entities involved should begin the preparation process in the months, even years, prior.

Let's consider those who were charged with protecting the safety of attendees at the 2019 Winter Olympics in South Korea. Security experts from dozens of countries, led by South Korea's government agencies, came together to formulate a strategic public safety plan. Coordination began years before the actual event and included different groups from within specific countries.

For instance, U.S. representation **included governmental and non-governmental organizations:**

- Diplomatic Security Service, responsible for protecting its embassies and citizens traveling outside of its borders
- Overseas Security Advisory Council, a voluntary organization of U.S. companies and entities that operate overseas, some of which were involved in the games
- U.S. National Olympic Committee and its security team.

A good first step is to identify a core planning group—organized around a common public safety goal and resourced with key decision makers from each of the participating stakeholder groups and planning agencies. Each member of the planning group should have decision-making power within their respective organization—both in the lead-up to the event, but also in case of an emergency on the day of.

Building on the first best practice, this core planning group should establish a single point of contact at each agency to manage information flows and emergency management plans. Having this structure in place helps to ensure positive outcomes and mitigates harm to individuals and/or damage to physical and digital assets.

Keep in mind that it's important for the planning group to have access to relevant, real-time information so that they stay abreast of emerging incidents—such as extreme weather—be it before they occur or as they progress over minutes, hours and days. As a best practice, tailor the information to the event's size, scale and geography to receive the most relevant data and accelerate the group's ability to respond.

When event preparation and management includes real-time information as a key component, it allows for emergency response plans to be executed more effectively, enabling public sector agencies and organizations to mobilize resources quickly in critical, time-sensitive situations—and maintain real-time visibility into incidents as they unfold.

# Stress Test Response Plans

Once all stakeholders have been assembled into a core planning group and communications symmetry begins to materialize, the planning group should develop and test an array of response plans that cover a wide range of potentially impactful safety incidents. It's vital that any strategies developed are well documented, scalable and flexible enough to be modified based on the size, nature and location of the unexpected incidents.

While it is common to plan for the worst-case scenario, large-scale events are more likely to have multiple, small-scale disturbances that occupy the public safety team's time. Knowing this, it's critical that response plans can be adjusted to fit multiple scenarios.

Once a public safety strategy is agreed upon, it's time to thoroughly and vigorously test it—before it is operationalized. **Tabletop crisis exercises** are a proven and effective means for testing the effectiveness of response plans as they help to uncover flaws and gaps in safety strategies.

Also useful are practice drills. Aim to make them as realistic as possible. As such, whenever possible, leverage the event venue and simulate the use of the technology that will be used. Doing so will help teams be better informed, prepared and ready to act should a major crisis or disruption occur during the event—even when under immense pressure.

In today's vast and evolving threat landscape, information symmetry and access to real-time data that informs cross-agency communications and collaboration are the foundation for a solid public safety strategy. The building blocks that follow—a clearly defined preparation process that begins well in advance of an event and well documented, thoroughly tested response plans—are just as vital in ensuring the safety and success of large-scale events.

As the world continues to scale back COVID-19 limitations on in-person interaction and activities, it will be more critical than ever for security leaders to institute the processes and best practices needed to achieve their number one priority: to protect event attendees as well as those in the surrounding communities.

## Learn More

Learn more about the value of **First Alert's real-time alerting** to public sector agencies and organizations.