

How IFEMA manages the most important aspect of your event: security

An interview with IFEMA's security Director

It is one of the most important responsibilities of the event organizer: the safety of attendees. IFEMA takes this mission very seriously and is here to ensure that risks are kept under control. We spoke with Alfonso Illescas Riaño, director of security and self-protection at IFEMA, to better understand the keys to a 'low risk' event.

A four-pillar security strategy

IFEMA bases its security strategy on four key pillars (called the "4P" in the Spanish version):

Foresee. We carry out a constant exercise of anticipation, attempting to be ahead of the materialization of any risk, anticipating the possibility of it occurring and the probability of its occurrence.

Prevent. We take all possible measures to try to avoid the materialization of any risk.

Prepare. We have trained personnel according to defined procedures for each risk, as well as the necessary material and technical means and in a permanent state of operation.

Protect. React and act in a timely manner against any threat by executing the established protocols effectively.

SIZE MATTERS: RISKS INCREASE AS THE COMPLEXITY, VOLUME, AND VISIBILITY OF AN EVENT GROW



Six types of risks to be monitored

In order to implement effective safety processes, IFEMA has defined six types of risks and, for each one, its specific procedure or protocol of action - with possible variations -, depending on the severity in which it is manifested. For this purpose, three types of emergency situations have been defined: emergency response, partial emergency and general emergency.



Fire. It is one of the scenarios that can be more complicated. What is fundamental is that, in case of an incident, even a minor one, security should receive information ensuring action that avoids getting into a more serious situation, using simple measures or more complex ones such as evacuation.



Antisocial events, from unanticipated demonstrations of greater or lesser virulence (whether social, political, or international) to altercations between people from different groups, or criminal acts (abductions for instance...). Lately, a risk is of violent events whose most serious expression would be an indiscriminate terrorist attack.



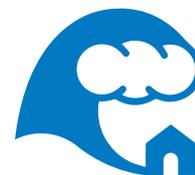
Bomb threat, in any of its possible variations, either by a communication or in case of the presence of a suspect element.



Medical emergency. The massive presence of people in congresses (public, exhibitors, organizers, collaborating companies and IFEMA staff) at every stage of an event (setup, celebration, tear down) makes it necessary to implement health care measures by different entities. This also includes action against possible incidents generated as a result of the work activity during setup and tear down whose risks, however, are previously managed by the corresponding department of the venue.



NRBC threats (Nuclear, Radiological, Biological and Chemical Defense). This is an unlikely threat at a congress or trade show; its most likely occurrence (detection of suspected substances in envelopes or packages) could occur within the scope of the administrative activity of the site.



Acts of nature. This means mostly the possibility of flooding, generated a situation of exceptional rains.

The levels of action according to the severity of the risk

As we have mentioned, the emergency response model is implemented based on three possible scenarios according to their level of seriousness: emergency response, partial emergency or general emergency.

To this end, the venue has designed the mandatory Self-Protection Plan, which is reviewed every three years by the competent authority in the field of Civil Protection. It is a "living" document, constantly improved on the basis of experiences and new knowledge, tailored to the needs and characteristics of the activity of IFEMA. Once in place, we have a permanent challenge of maintaining its effectiveness, constituting itself as the fundamental tool to protect the integrity of people, facilities and assets for which we must respond.

What safety equipment do you have?

IFEMA has had a security department for almost thirty years, with personnel authorized by the Ministry of Interior for managerial functions in security, highly qualified and with a great experience in the direction, planning and execution of safety and security in major events.

In case of a need for evacuation, IFEMA personnel and collaborating companies (restoration, hostesses, cleaning, access control, registration, wardrobes) are integrated in this process, based on established protocols, for which they have previously received training and annual recycling.

For external events, do you offer services à la carte?

IFEMA provides the general security of the venue, dimensioned according to the number of events and their specifics. Additionally, on the basis of new licenses obtained, it assumes the vigilance and security that ensures the development of certain events by making available the staff and the means to ensure compliance with that objective, regardless of which the organizers can contract the additional security they consider. In addition, based on the different design possibilities, in each event and for each installation (hall, auditorium...), a specific plan of action is generated in case of evacuation.

What external factors affect the security plan?

There are many, but I will indicate three that seem of special relevance to me:

- The national or international character of the event, whether it is for a professional or public audience, its volume, size, transcendence and particular characteristics.
- The overlap of events of different characteristics even if in different phases (for instance, when a setup coincides with an event).
- The current hot topics in the news. For example, a few years ago during FITUR, at the height of the international Ebola crisis, we focused on action protocols in the field of health emergencies.
- All the information collected serves as a reference for risk analysis and threat assessment on which the safety plan will be based.

Who is responsible for security during events? Exclusively IFEMA or the organizer has part of the responsibility?

IFEMA has a permanent safety and emergency process that gives general coverage to the event in the venue. Organizers can also have their own security. We then ensure coordination between the two parties based on protocols that include defining with the IFEMA security manager a person on the organizer's side, as a valid interlocutor in case of this type of situations.

Who makes the decision in a moment of crisis, of evacuation?

The Emergency Action Plan is activated by the Emergency Chief of the hall, and is executed under his/her command, in constant contact with his/her superiors, as well as with the person designated by the organizer of the event.

During the setup and the event, external services (catering, hostesses, assemblers, etc.) are contracted. Should these personnel have security training?

If the personnel hired by the event belong to IFEMA's collaborating companies (catering, hostesses, cleaning, access control, accreditations, wardrobes), these are personnel trained for emergencies on the premises. If they are from other companies, they should have, like any other person on the premises, enough information to behave in an appropriate way in case of a dangerous situation.

How is an alarm communicated?

There are several ways. A call to the emergency IFEMA telephone number, in permanent operation 24/7, is received at our Control Center, operated by security personnel. All our staff know the relevant information they have to provide in that event, and how to do it: "who am I? Where am I? What is happening?" are the important questions. There are emergency phones throughout the halls and emergency pushbuttons. And of course, any IFEMA security staff can also be notified.

Any other specific security concerns?

They can arise from logistic aspects, when specific requirements of days, hours and access points are generated for materials during the setup, which can generate collapses by concentration of vehicles, both inside and outside the venue, if not planned with a prior consensus with IFEMA.

When an event is held, is a briefing planned with the organizer?

Initially, the organizer receives in writing adequate information on security and emergencies, but we can still hold a meeting about security as well as the necessary contacts to ensure coordination of all areas of security.

How do you control the number of people entering and leaving a congress?

Regardless of the access control system established by the organizer, a control is carried out by means of a people counting system with sensors installed by IFEMA at the entrances of the pavilion, which transmit in real time the information of the accesses and exits that occur at each point. Additionally, once the event is over, a report with information on the registered behavior is available, which can be analyzed on several dimension (dates, time slots...).

What are the major security challenges?

To ensure a permanent technological update, which allows us to face known or other risks that may arise and where information management has a key role.

We also have to maintain the balance in the design of devices that allow the protection of people, installations and goods without creating added discomfort and in such a way that, without altering the principles of safety, they generate specific and concrete models for each type of event.