

Emergency Response Lessons from Report on Indiana Stage Collapse



One of the staples of the summer is the outdoor concert. At locations everywhere, thousands gather at music festivals, state fairs and other events to hear their favorite bands play. But as we've unfortunately seen in the last few years, outdoor concerts can turn deadly.

Recent Stage Collapses

Although it wouldn't be fair to say that fatal stage collapses are common, it does seem like there's been a spate of them recently:

- **Aug. 1, 2009:** A stage at a country music festival in Alberta collapsed when a fierce storm blew through, killing a woman. Three companies involved in putting on the show were charged with 33 OHS charges. But the Crown later [dismissed those charges](#), claiming there was no reasonable chance of conviction.
- **Aug. 13, 2011:** Nearly 12,000 people were waiting for the start of a concert by the band Sugarland at the Indiana State Fairgrounds when a temporary structure supporting spotlights and other equipment mounted on top of the stage collapsed. Seven people died and more than 40 required medical treatment.
- **June 16, 2012:** During setup for a Radiohead concert in

Toronto, a stage collapsed, killing a crew member. The incident is still under investigation.

What's notable about these incidents is that although the collapse itself can obviously be deadly, the aftermath can be just as dangerous if proper emergency response measures aren't in place.

Findings from Report on Indiana Stage Collapse

On April 12, 2012, the Indian State Fair Commission (ISFC) released a 425-page Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan based on the recommendations of an investigation by Witt Associates into the aftermath of the collapse.

The investigation focused on the emergency preparedness and response measures. According to an executive summary of the investigation, although some emergency preparedness steps had been taken, there were areas that needed improvement.

For example, the emergency response plan and procedures weren't fully developed. There wasn't a clear understanding of the applicability of the plan and procedures to the State Fair. And a senior ISFC official wasn't aware of his role in the plan, which didn't address multi-agency coordination.

In addition, ISFC relied heavily on contractors for the major productions at the stage. But with limited exceptions, contractors weren't aware of the emergency response plan and procedures or involved in their development.

The ISFC didn't have a comprehensive plan or schedule for public safety and emergency management training. For example, ISFC staff didn't attend public safety training regularly and weren't trained on the Incident Command System (ICS).

Lastly, although a Tabletop Exercise involving a severe weather incident was conducted, the participants didn't hold a post-exercise discussion to evaluate the exercise. An After-

Action Report summarizing lessons learned and recommendations from the exercise wasn't prepared but an Executive Summary of the exercise was subsequently provided. However, recommendations from this exercise weren't implemented before the 2011 State Fair.

Lessons for All Workplaces

The report make various recommendations that can also be applied to emergency response planning for many workplaces, including:

- Companies should have updated and current emergency response plans and procedures. All employees—and appropriate contractors—should be aware of and trained on their roles in the plan and should participate in regular exercises for the plan.
- There should be a formal incident command system designed to facilitate coordination of decision-making and resources from multiple entities when emergencies when they occur.
- There should be a team responsible for handling all phases of emergency management (preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response and recovery). The head of this team should report directly to senior management.