



HOW THE SAUSAGE GOT MADE

The New Crowd Management ANSI Standard

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Summary: Despite the crowd-related disasters of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries occurring everywhere from nightclubs to stadiums to religious events, there has been no authoritative standard for crowd management, even in the countries that have looked most deeply into the issue. Until now.

Following is an inside account of the upcoming Crowd Management ANSI standard by the Chair of the group that created it.

It feels like *hubris* to discuss a major industry standard that has not yet received final approval. But having cleared the last significant hurdle in the American National Standards Institute (“ANSI”) approval process, I am guardedly optimistic that a shiny new Crowd Management ANSI standard is now in the home stretch, heading towards Spring 2020 publication.

The standard-writing process is not for the impatient or thin-skinned. Here is a (highly abridged) account of how this one came into the world.

Back in November 2016, the Entertainment Services Technology Association (“ESTA”) joined forces with the Event Safety Alliance (“ESA”) to create an Event Safety Working Group. In an industry that relies heavily on folk wisdom and on-the-job training, the idea was to identify key issues regarding safety and security practices at live events and gather subject matter experts from around the world to address them in a collaborative and systematic manner in order to create authoritative guidance where none currently exists.

The Event Safety Working Group used this process to update and expand upon some of the most important chapters in ESA’s groundbreaking 2013 *Event Safety Guide*. As an expert in crowd management who testifies in some of North America’s biggest lawsuits involving life safety, I was eager to offer a fresh take on Chapter 9, Crowd Management.

By December 2016, I (was) volunteered to chair the newly formed Crowd Management Task Group. In my first email to the group, I offered this vision:

My general critique of the Crowd Management text that currently exists is that a standard in a fact-specific area like this should emphasize issues to consider, as opposed to specific things one must always do. I aspire to teach readers *how* to think, not *what* to think.

Over the next year, we had spirited discussions about what a crowd management standard would cover and who the stakeholders would be. Draft text regarding the scope of the standard and foundational definitions was circulated and commented upon. We had

constructive discussions in person, by videoconference, and by email. Comments ranged from broad thematic suggestions to individual word choices. As we tried to decide what we were prepared to say, even small changes in one area tended to influence other text or change how we approached another topic.

Drafting by committee is a challenge. The Crowd Management Task Group's first year was messy, time-consuming, yielded relatively little written product, and was absolutely essential. During this period, a friend taught me that rather than saying "No" to any idea, a better response is "Yes, and...," which compels one to find a connection even in suggestions that initially seem off-topic. This process of never entirely rejecting an idea, instead finding some kernel of value that made the standard stronger, became an essential part of drafting and editing.

It also made for numerous tangents and dead ends. Early in the drafting process, I collected event photos that I thought illustrated issues the standard should address – in the end, we used almost none of them. For a couple of months, I became so hung up on a question about crowd dynamics and barricade shapes that I spent hours working with my daughter's brilliant physics teacher. We had a great time drawing on a whiteboard and crashing into furniture in his classroom, but that analysis never made it into the text either.

By November 2018, more than a year after we began the document, we circulated a much more polished second draft. More comments followed while I stepped away for a few weeks to help run ESA's big annual conference, the Event Safety Summit. In early December, refreshed and with a bit of distance, I took out the sharp editorial knives for the first time.

In my law practice, I do a lot of writing. I have always found the act of creating new text to be difficult, as I struggle to organize my thoughts and tell the story succinctly. I pour thoughts onto the page, figuring that I will later hack away the weak material and put the good parts in the right place. Editing is satisfying because it brings order from chaos, much like developing a plan to manage the crowd at a general admission event.

By December 10, 2018, a week of furious cutting, rewriting, and reorganizing yielded a draft that, for the first time, generally resembled the final product.

We optimistically set a comment deadline of December 31. The group made a last few changes. On January 8, 2019, the document was forwarded to the entire Event Safety Working Group for its review. The Working Group approved that draft at its January 26, 2019 meeting, sending it out for public review.

On April 18, 2019, the results came back. The Task Group received 22 comments, which one of the Working Group chairs noted "is certainly a substantial amount to work with,

but far fewer than we sometimes get on draft standards.” Happily, the comments, many of which came from NFPA reviewers, were constructive, reasonable, and relatively easy to address. On May 21, 2019, I circulated to the Crowd Management Task Group the reviewer comments and proposed responses along with an updated draft standard for their review, all in anticipation of the next quarterly Working Group meeting on July 20, 2019.

Two months passed without a peep. It looked like the document would be approved!

Alas, no. At the July 20 meeting, the language in one section was challenged, and suggestions were raised about adding additional text in another part of the document. I felt surprised and disappointed, and I wanted to be finished already. Not my finest hour. Later, I realized that not only did these changes make the document better, they also forced me to re-read the entire standard to see what else they changed, which caused me to find other imprecise or inarticulate phrasing. A valuable and humbling experience for which future users should be grateful.

The newly edited document was circulated back to the Crowd Management Task Group, which had no further changes. At the October 26, 2019 meeting of the Event Safety Working Group, the document was approved unanimously. As of this writing, it is out for a second round of public review. If that passes without incident, then the standard will receive a final vote at the next Working Group meeting in January 2020. Fingers crossed!

As written, this story features a lot of the first person singular, which significantly misrepresents how any important and wide-ranging standard comes to life. I work with standards a lot, but having never written one I relied heavily on the Event Safety Working Group’s wise and experienced leaders, Don Cooper of the Event Safety Alliance and Richard Nix of ESTA. And the document was shaped and scrutinized by more than two dozen members of the Crowd Management Task Group, along with everyone who offered public comments and other outside readers of various drafts. I have the fancy title of Task Group Chair, but other than the mistakes, which are mine, this was a collaborative effort.

Now that you have reached the end of this article, you will note that I have not described its content. As currently formatted, **ES/2019-2001r2 – Crowd Management** is 30 single-spaced pages. It is hard to briefly summarize three years of work, much less work in which every word matters. I hope this description of the process of creation will pique your interest to read the document when its final version is published. In my biased opinion, we did a pretty good job teaching the reader not only *what* to think about managing crowds, but *how*.

SAA, November 3, 2019