Super Bowl Risk Management a Team Effort

By Patricia-Anne Tom | February 4, 2011

The Super Bowl XLV may be the biggest game of the year, and to some, it also presents super-sized risk management challenges. The National Football League said it is expecting a record crowd of 105,000 attendees at Cowboys Stadium. Of that number, about 95,000 fans will be in the seats and suites inside the stadium, along with about 5,000 media members and staff, said League spokesman Brian McCarthy. Approximately 5,000 people also paid $200 apiece to be in an area outside the stadium watching on big-screen TVs.

With a crowd that size — one that exceeds the population of Green Bay itself (population 104,000) — plus the number of employees, vendors and facilities involved in the event, security and public safety are of utmost concern. Crowds filled the street and caused $150,000 in damage in Pittsburg in 2009 after the Steelers won Super Bowl XLIII. Event organizers in North Texas are hoping to avoid similar disruption this year.

With the event the scope of the Super Bowl, there are issues of liability, employee safety, cancellation or preemption no the broadcast, accidents that could befall on the patrons, extreme weather conditions and even terrorism concerns, according to Chris Rogers, director of risk control for Aon Risk Solutions' national entertainment group. Plus, potential risks and threats extend beyond game day.

“There are large-scale events taking place from now until Monday around the Super Bowl,” said Steve Miller, director of systems integration for the National Sports Security Laboratory of the National Center for Sports Safety and Security, noting there are about 10 days of festivities. Miller said his staff will be traveling to North Texas to watch and learn from the security efforts, so that the Laboratory can help develop best practices for future sporting venues.

One area the NFL, Cowboys Stadium and North Texas Super Bowl XLV Host Committee are probably concerned about is complying with Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules and National Fire Protection Association life safety code regulations, Rogers predicted. “Life safety regs are the rules that determine how many exits you need, how wide, what training staff needs and controls from sprinklers to fire alarms.” New [NFPA] code requires one crowd manager for every 250 people at an event, he explained.

Severe weather also plays heavily into risk management and business continuity plans in an event of this size, Rogers added, noting the stadium has probably been tracking the weather patterns for years. “Most stadiums today will have not only a representative from NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) there, they’ll also have private weather organizations tracking and advising them on what the weather conditions and situations are that, even in the event of a cancellation, there is a plan in place.”

Potential terrorist threats are also a concern, Rogers and Miller said. The Dallas Morning News has reported that the League will spend between $5 million and $6 million on security, including hiring private security personnel. Additionally, the paper reported that 200 FBI agents will be monitoring the area for potential terrorist threats, and the Environmental Protection Agency is monitoring the area's air quality.

Regardless of what is thrown their way, representatives from the NFL, Cowboys Stadium, North Texas Super Bowl XLV Host Committee and local law enforcement agencies say they are sufficiently prepared. While they were unable to talk specifics about
their risk management plans (probably for security reasons), planning for safety and security has been in the works for about three years, NFL’s McCarthy said.

All of the parties involved likely went through a risk evaluation and assessment to take into account the decisions and costs of those decisions. “Every business decision is a risk acceptance decision,” Rogers said. “Deciding when planning how many security guards and monitors you need, where they will be placed, who provides training, whether to defer some maintenance to the facility, those are all decisions that are risk acceptance decisions.”

Assistant Chief Will Johnson, who is overseeing Super Bowl security for the Arlington Police Department, told the Dallas Morning News that ensuring the safety and security has required cooperation with other agencies.

To pull off an event of this magnitude, the key to risk management is to “communicate, collaborate and cooperate,” Rogers said. There are five command centers in Dallas, Arlington, Ft. Worth and the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, and lots of personnel and technology being used to help execute security for the event, Miller added, but “all of those activities have to be coordinated effort.”

Ultimately the winning goal is if the fans and teams enjoy the Super Bowl festivities — not worry about personal safety preparedness, the organizers have said. After all, that’s what risk management professionals are for.

The Associated Press contributed to this article.

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