

Major Events Security Considerations in the UAE

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Headline sports events already include world class golf, tennis, horseracing, swimming, and rugby tournaments to Formula 1™ races, rally racing, and UCI cycling events mixed liberally with a growing array of concerts and cultural events as well as the much anticipated Asian Football Cup 2019, the FIFA World Cup 2022, and Expo 2020 events. This dynamic growth plays an important role in providing public entertainment, encouraging the business and leisure sector to drive employment, tourism, community development, as well as gains in other, related sectors.

While this rapid expansion, which includes hard and soft infrastructure, is very positive for both government and private enterprise, industry growth cannot be sustained without parallel development in regulatory structures and services that take into account some of the practical concerns of increased safety and security threats. Specifically, there need to be comprehensive strategic and safety plans to take into account the potential impact of risks manifested by major events, from fire and traffic congestion through cyber or terror attacks. A significant amount of the development and investment in the major events sector is founded on the requirement for safety and security.

Who Is Responsible for Ensuring Security?

It is important to note that, in addition to governmental entities such as tourism departments and sports councils, event rights holders, host facilities or venues, event organisers, broadcasters, sponsors, and a range of third party contractors will likely be involved in one or more stages of major event delivery. Even where stakeholder coordination is exemplary, there may be competing commercial interests and an imperfect flow of information and oversight as to all levels of potential risk. At one or more of these levels, commercial decisions may be taken to contract out of or to insure against certain identifiable risks. While this is often sound commercial practice, it may not necessarily prioritise risk identification and reduction. For this reason, the role the authorities – most notably the police – is paramount in coordinating an appropriate balance between hospitality and security.

The UAE Sports Law

In 2015, the Security of Sports Facilities and Events Resolution (Cabinet Resolution No. 31, concerning the Executive Regulations of Federal Law No. 8 of 2014) (the 'Resolution') was issued. It provides guidance around the scope of legal obligations affecting those involved in the organisation and hosting of sports events. The background and main objectives of the Resolution are to outline obligations concerning sports facility organisers, fan conduct, and tackling corruption. The guidelines are welcome at a time when the UAE has firmly established its credentials as a host for events across a broad spectrum of sports and looks to build on its strong record as a destination for sports and events tourism.

The Resolution is the primary vehicle through which the Ministry of Interior will oversee elements of safety and security at sports events in the UAE, leveraging the police (in Dubai for example, under the General Department of Protective Security and Emergency at Dubai Police), civil defence, and other relevant authorities as necessary. This is a cornerstone law for the UAE sports industry, so it is critical that people

and companies operating within it – including event organisers, authorised private security firms, sporting regulatory bodies, fans, teams, and other participants – fully understand their obligations to avoid falling foul of the law, which, at its most punitive, can carry serious criminal charges.

Some of the initial headline-grabbing elements of the Resolution relate to unruly fan behaviour, but it actually has a wide-ranging impact, from the planning, coordination, and safety behind event organisation through to on-pitch, court, or track conduct, as well as in the stands. The Resolution's target impact can loosely be grouped under three target areas in terms of application and addressing safety and security at sporting events through: (i) facility/venue and organiser practices; (ii) fan conduct; and (iii) anti-corruption.

Sports Facilities & Organisers

The bulk of the Resolution relates to sports facilities and organisers, with organisers and venue managers subject to specific new compliance requirements and oversight, aimed at ensuring the UAE is aligned with or setting global best practice. Most notably, all sporting events should have a flexible administrative and organisational guide, including necessary measures relevant to the nature and scope of the event (e.g., detailing proposed access/egress routes, safety procedures, security plans, communications, etc.), as well as specifics on the venue. This guide is subject to approval by a designated police contact.

For a number of sophisticated annual event organisers, designing, submitting, and ultimately implementing their event management plans, in accordance with their approved guide, will essentially cement and perhaps reformulate some elements of best practices they have previously established. This could, however, mean substantial change for some. These requirements are welcome, such as the need for a designated and qualified Event Security Officer to coordinate with a Police Observer, as defined in the Resolution. And the use of the latest technology in communications and crowd management, effectively mandating a blend of common sense with modern capabilities, to increase safety and security as appropriate for modern day sporting entertainment.

Fan Conduct

Sports fans face tougher fines for criminal actions conducted at events or venues. The Resolution does not replace the existing Penal Code in such circumstances, but it does complement it. This means that committing any Penal Code offence at a sporting event will now be considered an aggravating factor, so it would be likely to attract greater punishment than if it had been committed elsewhere. There will also now be formalised crowd restrictions on entering the field of play, bringing prohibited or dangerous materials into a venue, taking to or acquiring weapons inside a venue, violent conduct, throwing materials, insulting or racially abusing or gesturing at other people, disregarding facility rules, and using a venue for political purposes.

Anti-Corruption

Given what is unfolding in global sport at present – with various recognised international sporting bodies facing intense scrutiny around their actions – this aspect of the Resolution is not only timely but, in some ways, pioneering. In essence, it removes a significant chunk of self-regulation from sporting bodies and brings it under federal law. Cheating, fraud, or corruption in gaining rights to host a sporting event can now be punishable by a fine of up to AED 1 million, plus liability for certain costs and potential suspension of relevant activities for a minimum of two years.

Event Risk Management Plans

We would note that it is important to comply with the law and that doing so requires prompt application to the police with details of the proposed event. The initial application must include the time/date of the event, type of sport, details of the organisers and promoters, insurance policies, if any, security and safety plan(s), and the anticipated number of attendees. Depending on the size and type of event, the police may ask for further documents and details, but in all cases there is a risk of initial rejection and, consequently,

delay. As always, compliance will be aided by a solid internal corporate governance structure and culture, a prudent and comprehensive event risk management strategy, and good communications with the relevant authorities.

The full implementation and impact of the Resolution is yet to be seen, but they are potentially far reaching in their scope. However, it should be welcomed in terms of trying to ensure that the UAE, which already hosts some of the world's most popular sporting events and may have aspirations to host the Olympics, remains at the forefront of the global sporting events sector. Nonetheless, the rules need to be properly understood for companies and individuals to act within their boundaries. Getting this right will take time and significant effort, but it is a matter of compliance that cannot be avoided and should be pursued as a move towards best practices.

Steve Bainbridge will be discussing these issues at the Major Events Safety & Security Summit to be held on 25-27 April 2017 at Sofitel the Palm – Dubai. To register [click here](#).