

Security Spotlight

An informational Guide for Securitas Canada Clients and Employees



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Peaceful or Problem? How to Cope with Crowds



A political rally, a rush-hour train platform, a labor strike protest, a rock concert, a department store holiday sale, and a family reunion are different events, but they all have one thing in common; a crowd of people. In most cases, these gatherings will end without serious incident. But sometimes, a peaceful crowd can become a threatening mob. As a security practitioner, you have a duty to protect persons and property, but what can you do if you are faced with an angry mob?

WHAT IS A MOB?

We live in a great country, where people are guaranteed the right to peacefully assemble in groups. These groups, or crowds, are simply a number of people temporarily gathered together for a common purpose. They can range in number from a handful to a stadium full. Crowds are generally peaceful, even crowds of protestors, but circumstances, either random or planned, can change a peaceful crowd into an angry mob. Emotional tensions in a large crowd can be increased simply by the congestion which reduces each individual's personal space. The event which has drawn the crowd can provoke intense emotional responses, such as a political rally or a hotly contested sporting event.

In a highly charged, emotional atmosphere, a crowd can sometimes erupt into an unruly mob if a spark of conflict is ignited. Even normally law abiding citizens can be caught up in the heat of the moment and become members of a destructive mob. This can occur spontaneously, as when a fight breaks out due to pushing or other rude behavior. Other times, it can be deliberately caused by an

agitator seeking to enflame the crowd. Tempers can flare up due to adverse weather, delays in gaining access to an event, or the use of alcohol and other drugs that can reduce inhibitions and impair rational thought. As a security professional, you should be on watch for any factor that can turn a peaceful crowd into a violent mob. Stay focused on the crowd and keep your team members and supervisors advised of any conditions that may provoke mob behavior.

PREPARATION FOR ANTICIPATED CROWDS

The possibility of a crowd becoming a mob can be minimized with proper advance planning. Your supervisor should provide you with complete information about the crowd **before** you go on duty. You will be better prepared to spot and respond to potential trouble if you know about ...

- the reason for the gathering or the type of event.
- the area occupied.
- the size of the expected crowd.
- the characteristics of the people in the crowd.
- the identity of potential troublemakers.
- the location of command posts.
- who to contact for assistance—including police, fire, and emergency personnel.

If your post orders do not cover these specifics, ask your supervisor for the information.

When a crowd is anticipated, supervisors should, where ever

possible, assign security practitioners who have had training in crowd control, such as the classes available through the Securitas Center for Professional Development (SCPD).

As a uniformed symbol of authority, your presence can have a dramatic effect on crowd behavior and can help prevent the eruption of mob behavior. Maintain a visible presence and follow these guidelines to help you keep order and deter potential incitements of mob mentality.

- Behave professionally – do not swagger, strut, swear, argue, or become hostile in any way.
- Stay focused on the crowd, not the event.
- Do not have physical contact with crowd members.
- Keep calm and alert at all times. Do not show emotion.
- Be polite, but not subservient. You must be seen as being in charge and in control while passively allowing lawful crowd behavior.
- Do not respond to taunts, threats, or agitation.
- Maintain an even tone of voice and do not try to “out shout” aggressive individuals.
- Allow angry persons a chance to “vent” their feelings verbally. Actively listen to the person while waiting for them to pause for a breath and then take advantage of the opening to establish control of the conversation.
- Set reasonable and enforceable limits of acceptable behavior for crowd members.
- Call for assistance, as necessary.

RESPONSE TO A MOB

In the event of civil unrest, your first priority is always your personal safety and the safety of the persons and property you are protecting. Site administrators, supervisors, and security practitioners should take the following defensive steps.

- Use an authoritative but non-hostile tone of voice when addressing a crowd. Maintain an upright, confident, and commanding posture.
- Do not allow yourself to be surrounded by aggressive people. During a time of civil unrest symbols of authority can become targets for the mob’s rage. Always be aware of your escape routes.
- Ensure that all site personnel are informed of the situation and are sheltered.
- Move people to pre-selected safe havens and secure the site against trespass and vandalism.
- Maintain visible posts at all open access points, as long as it is safe to do so.
- Restrict access by locking doors, gates, shutters, elevators, escalators, etc. (as per Post Orders).
- Turn security cameras outward to view any disturbances and video tape as much activity as possible. · Use public address systems to keep building occupants informed of conditions. Remember to keep your voice calm and matter-of-fact at all times.

- If there is no immediate threat and transportation is available, consider evacuating the occupants to a safer area.
- If evacuation is not possible, use all available resources to prepare for prolonged habitation. Riots can sometimes last for days.
- Be aware that in times of severe civil unrest authorities (police, fire, EMS) may not be able to immediately respond to calls for help. Be prepared to be as self-sufficient as possible.
 - First aid and medical supplies should be fully stocked.
 - Firefighting equipment should be fully operational and at hand.
 - Communications equipment (cell phones and radios) should be fully charged.
 - Flashlights should have fresh batteries and replacement batteries should be on hand.

Much of mob behavior has been associated with the anonymity of an individual in a crowd. Recent research has shown that when people are aware that their behavior is being recorded, they are more likely to conform to social norms and less likely to behave in a criminal manner. If you are equipped with a video recording device, make it known to any person you must confront. There is a good chance that the act of being recorded will cause the person to modify their behavior and deescalate the situation.

SAFETY IN THE FACE OF CHAOS

A mob is volatile and often uncontrollable. It can flare up and die down in minutes, or rage on for days. Depending on the specific conditions and circumstances that created the mob, you may be able to successfully restore calm by using some of the techniques above. But never forget that your safety and the safety of the people you are protecting is your number one concern. **If control is not possible, get yourself and others to safety as quickly as possible, immediately call for assistance, and secure the premises to the best of your ability.** If there is no immediate threat and transportation is available, consider evacuating the occupants to a safer area.

Training Helps You Be Prepared

Mobs are unpredictable. The best way to deal with them is to prepare and train in advance. This article contains a number of preparation tips. You can find more good guidance about dealing with crowds and mobs by reviewing training courses available through the SCPD library and the Learning Management System (LMS) online classes. Working With Crowds, The World of Crowd Safety Management has good tips at <http://www.workingwithcrowds.com/north-america-canada/>. Search for information about Crowd Control.