

TRAPPED

in a

CROWD

Why Crowds Get Dangerous & How to Survive a “Crush”

By Kevin Reeve, onPoint Tactical

I used to love going to sporting events. I regularly spent Saturday afternoons in a football stadium with 65,000 other fans, or in a basketball arena with 23,000 other basketball crazies, or a Friday night at Disney World with 80,000 of my newfound friends. I had no problem with large crowds. I loved the lack of predictability, the spontaneity of the crowd. Crowds were exhilarating. No more.

The age of terrorism has changed all that. Two hundred people were killed in a shopping district explosion in Baghdad this week; 175+ wounded. I guess we have come to expect that sort of thing “over there.” But large crowds are tempting targets for the terrorists here in America. The Orlando nightclub shooting by an Islamic extremist pledging allegiance to ISIS is likely only a first. I fully expect more violent attacks with higher body counts. The devil’s arithmetic.

Which is why I now avoid crowds. Or if I must go to a large store or other venue, I won't go unless I can carry my firearm.

"But if you stop going to events, the terrorists win," some say.

To which I say, "Yes, philosophically, they win, but practically, I win if I don't die in a terror attack or subsequent crowd surge. Along with my spouse, my children, and my friends - we all win, if I don't die or am not injured. It's a pretty big win to stay alive and stay in the game."

Others say, "I feel safe in a crowd."

Thousands of people felt safe at the Bataclan in Paris, evidenced in a tragic photo of hundreds of smiling, happy concert goers taken just prior to the massacre. They felt secure, but their deaths were imminent.

So what would I do if I did attend an event with a large audience or inadvertently found myself in a crowd?

One of the problems with a very large crowd, is the difficulty of looking for indicators of problems, of questionable people, of unusual movement patterns that tell me something is about to happen. Anything that indicates a pre-event orientation is a precursor of the event.

So if those details are difficult to identify, what else can I do before and after an unpredictable event has occurred? What is the best plan to maneuver in the aftermath of an attack or disruption?

Upon arriving, locate the exits. Stand or sit near the exits, and if possible, facing the main entrance. In a restaurant, I sit closest to the back exit facing the entrance.

Locate the entrance/exit with the least amount of foot traffic. Could you find it in a smoke filled room? Are the other people in your party aware of it? Costco has one big main entrance. Do you know the location of the back door exits?

Keep moving. In a panic situation, a crowd will surge away from the source of danger. When the surging crowd hits the choke point of the exit, people are going to get crushed. Experts know more about crowd disasters than ever before, but the general public is still naive about the lethal dangers of crowds. You need to know this:

“If crowd densities rise above four people per square metre, and especially if they get to six, they become prone to two broad types of accidents. Both – be warned – are horrifying. A “**progressive crowd collapse**” often begins when one person falls over, perhaps because of a shock wave travelling through the crowd, or just because they slip. Suddenly denied the fallen person’s body to lean against, but still under pressure on the other side, the adjacent people fall on top of them, or are knocked over trying to help. This in turn creates a larger hole, which ever more people are forced into, and more, and more, piled high on top of each other until the pressure eases. It is being buried alive in bodies, perhaps bodies that you know.

A progressive crowd collapse often happens when a large crowd is moving steadily through a confined route, driving ever forwards.” [“Haj Crush”](#)

“The other type of crowd disaster occurs when people are simply squeezed to such an extent that they can no longer inflate their lungs, and die gradually of compressive asphyxiation. This is a “**crowd crush**”, and it typically happens when ever more people push into a confined area – either on the way in, or trying to get out. Often those who die in crowd crushes are the ones against the wall. ...many terrible fires are crowd crushes, too. No matter how calmly a crowd behaves, it can only fit through a narrow exit at a certain rate. **Those caught at the back have a choice between pushing harder and waiting to die.** In 1997, 243 people were killed on the Haj when a fire among the tents caused a crowd crush. [“Haj Crush”](#)

Focus on movement. “Move, move, move” is a good mantra, because paralysis tends to set in.

According to the [Marine Corps Times](#), Imran Yousef, a Marine veteran, had just walked to the back of the Pulse nightclub to a staff hallway, when he heard the first shots of the terror attack in Orlando. Club goers poured into the back hallway, cramming in “sardine style.”

“That’s when his Marine Corps training kicked in, he said. He ran toward a locked door that people had huddled around, too terrified to move.

"I'm screaming 'Open the door! Open the door!'" Yousuf told [CBS](#). "And no one is moving because they are scared.

"There was only one choice — either we all stay there and we all die, or I could take the chance, and I jumped over to open that latch and we got everyone that we can out of there."

"By creating the exit, Yousuf estimated that about 70 people were able to get out of the nightclub safely."

A Delta operator told me that a training mantra is: "Movement is life." Move towards an uncrowded exit. In an emergency people are astonishingly biased towards going out the way they came in. They will pass by perfectly good and uncrowded exits in favor of the way they came in. This is true in airplane exits, concert venues and soccer crowds. Therefore if you have chosen a seldom used exit, you will be less likely to be part of a "crowd crush" or a "progressive crowd collapse."

This [video](#), by Professor Edwin Galea, of the University of Greenwich, is a simulation of the crowd at the Great White concert in RI in 2003. Fireworks on stage ignited the soundproofing material and 100 people died; 200 more were injured. Witnesses would later state that they saw people turned away from the back door exit by security who told them that the exit was "for band members only." Another [witness](#) said, "People's heads were on fire." In the first 3-5 minutes, 100 people were dead on the floor.

A reporter inside the concert hall shot video from the beginning of the incident until the building was entirely engulfed. You can see people stacked in the doorways, most of whom would die. [GRAPHIC VIDEO](#)

If there is an active shooter, take cover initially only if there is no reasonable exit. The best form of cover is to return fire. If that is not an option, cover is anything that will stop a bullet. Movies have taught you that tables, couches, car doors stop bullets. Wrong. Rock walls, concrete pillars stop bullets. **Concrete. Look for concrete.**

Use cover only long enough to find an exit, including windows. Then move, move, move. In the Paris concert venue, people thought that if they played dead, they would be ignored. Not so. The Islamic terrorists walked around and shot the people lying on the ground in the head. Some people sought cover and waited. They too were later

found and shot. Those who survived kept moving until they were out of harm's way. Some took temporary cover, but most of the survivors eventually found an exit.

Why are people trapped in crowds, either with active shooters, or due to other emergencies resulting in deaths or serious injuries?

“Why do they keep happening? That is easy. These are not natural disasters. They happen because no one stops them. Indeed, Professor Galea thinks they are happening more frequently. ‘Not all of them get reported,’ he says. ‘But I think they are increasing. We’re trying to service more people in less time, which means higher crowd densities, which is leading to increased frequency. More urbanisation, I think that’s the key thing.’ [The Haj](#)

Recommendations:

- Find an exit that has a small amount of traffic coming in or out.
- Move towards that exit. In the middle, move towards the edges.
- Take cover behind something made of concrete.
- Move as soon as you can. Keep moving.
- Better yet, avoid the crowds.

I'll be home watching YouTube.

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