



JUVENILE GATHERINGS AND FLASH MOBS: CRITICAL PLANNING AND RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

Community events and public venues have become locations targeted by juveniles and young adults. Such events can be spontaneous or planned events fueled by social media, which can overwhelm communities and burden public safety resources. Recent events in New Jersey have resulted in injuries to officers and others, necessitated mass arrests, and forced the cancellation of events.¹⁻³

Fully preventing these dangerous incidents is likely not entirely possible. However, Chiefs of Police should strive to mitigate the risks associated with these events through intelligence gathering, developing specific training programs addressing the unique risks of these incidents, identifying potential high-risk or known locations, informing local government officials of the potential for such disturbances at community events, requesting the necessary equipment and staffing, developing contingency plans in the event of disturbances or rioting, and integrating into the agency's existing community education platforms the dangers associated with mass juvenile and young adult "flash mobs."

Chiefs of Police should also ensure they review the many resources in this bulletin, as community events often have rides, fireworks, or other amusements that might require specific insurance indemnification. Ensuring all appropriate insurance requirements will likely not prevent or help quell disturbances or riots. However, meeting all requirements will likely assist in any potential criticism of the event planning process. Although insurance coverage for events might not be the responsibility of the Chief of Police, it is likely in the best interest of their officers and communities to ensure that appropriate discussions and actions have taken place with the relevant stakeholders.

A. Some Considerations for the Chief of Police in developing a comprehensive agency plan concerning the risk of juveniles and young adults purposely congregating at community events and venues:

1. Develop an Incident Action Plan (IAP) for any identified location for community events, especially those, regardless of expected attendance, that might be at risk of a juvenile or young adult flash mob.
2. Discuss with local government officials or event organizers the potential risks associated with events that might take place during the late afternoon or post-sunset.
3. Include representatives from fire, OEM, EMS, Mutual Aid coordinators, and other law enforcement agencies who might be part of an initial or mutual aid response in the planning process. Review the agency's mutual aid plan and policy to determine if any changes are necessary. A sample Mutual Aid Policy policy is available [here](#).
 - Ensure specific staging areas for law enforcement mutual aid, fire, and EMS are identified in the planning process.
 - Identify individuals who will staff critical coordinator positions, such as Staging, Arrestee Transport, EMS security, and more.

- Conduct a pre-event site visit of the event location, adjacent areas, and areas where others might congregate. Evaluate possible threats and items that can be used as weapons, such as rocks, decorations, or other materials, and consider any options to mitigate such threats.
 - Ensure adequate police vehicles and other emergency vehicles are present at the scene. Often officers might be deployed on foot, and it's possible that additional patrol vehicles will be needed for prisoner transports or for an emergency response to nearby locations where agitators have fled to or congregate.
4. As appropriate, the event IAP, including all maps, communication methods, and other pertinent materials, should be provided and explained to all officers in advance who might respond to a request for additional assistance.
 5. Review local ordinances and discuss the possibility of any necessary modifications or additions with the Municipal Attorney. Ensure that any regulations expected to be enforced by police are supported by existing law or local ordinance. Some communities have enacted local ordinances prohibiting juveniles from having backpacks during certain times or at certain locations.⁴
 6. Establish an effective intelligence and data-gathering process:
 - Determine the feasibility of monitoring intelligence sources for such events. Although they can be spontaneous, there may be some indication of the planning of such events. In addition to social media platforms being a valuable source of information, agencies should reinforce in the training program the value of contact with business and property owners and the general public as a vital source of information concerning the desire of some to interrupt such events. A sample Intelligence Gathering Policy is available [here](#).
 - Establish and maintain contact with neighboring or county-wide police agencies to share and learn about community events that have been disrupted or are at risk of such. Ensure adjacent jurisdictions and any agency identified as part of the initial mutual aid response wave are specifically notified.
 - Notify the [New Jersey Regional Operations & Intelligence Center](#) and the [New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness](#) in advance of the event.
 - Provide clear direction for personnel concerning the call for service coding so that data can be collected to help support future legislative initiatives and response planning.
 - Data collection concerning incidents should include a method to track offenses and other incidents that occurred at the event, such as assaults, thefts, trespassing, criminal mischief, and more.
 7. Engage with the community as a united effort to raise awareness about the dangers of unsupervised youth at community events or locations where juveniles might gather. Encourage reporting of suspicious activity and any information concerning the possibility of an unsanctioned event occurring.
 8. Develop a strategic message campaign for citizen police academy sessions, neighborhood watch meetings, Junior Police Academies, school-police programs, and more.
 9. Evaluate the agency's current capabilities, including equipment, staffing, and specialized training. Speak with Chiefs of similar-sized agencies or agencies that have managed similar events or incidents to determine gaps in capabilities, staffing, and equipment. Develop a short and long-term budgeting plan and request needed resources and staffing from local officials. Appropriately document such requests.

B. Planning considerations for a community event where there is any concern of a possible juvenile or young adult gathering or flash mob:

1. Establish communication with event organizers or representatives to facilitate cooperation and address any concerns or issues during the event.
2. Identify specific locations or businesses where it's likely that juveniles or young adults will flee to or congregate near the primary event location.
 - Evaluate the benefits of contacting such businesses in advance of the event to establish clear lines of communication, which might be highly valuable if closing such businesses rapidly will help contain the situation.
3. Inform the community in advance of established rules, laws, local ordinances, and specific event details to help promote responsible behavior among attendees while also ensuring they understand the consequences of unlawful behavior.
4. Contact the property owners of the event location. Discuss potential liability concerns and any applicable laws or ordinances with property owners. If the municipality owns the property, discuss any specific insurance or liability considerations with your Municipal Attorney or Risk Management Consultant.
5. As appropriate, provide information to the community and media to communicate possible road closures and any prohibited activities, including information from a property owner prohibiting vehicles or persons from their premises.
6. Review the Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund [Special Events Resource Page](#), which has important information concerning:
 - [MEL Community & Safety Leadership Guide to Special Events](#) (Includes pre-planning considerations, insurance indemnification requirements, special events checklists, and more.)
 - [Video: Best Practices for Safe & Successful Events](#)
 - [MSI Bulletin: Parade Risk Management Best Practices](#) (Even when the event might not include a parade, this resource contains many considerations that are highly valuable for any event, especially incidents where there is any concern for violence. Incident command structure and training requirements, hold harmless agreements, weather issues, mass violence considerations, suspicious activity reporting, and more are provided.)
 - [Parade Planning Worksheet](#)
 - [Special Events Best Practices](#) (Includes information concerning insurance coverage for fireworks, rides, and other amusements.)
7. Provide an adequate police presence to deter illegal conduct. Contact other jurisdictions with similar incidents to learn about their staffing levels and whether such resource commitments were appropriate.
8. Ensure event staff and volunteers are informed of the IAP as appropriate. Ensure they are encouraged to report any concerning behavior and establish clear lines of communication to initiate critical notifications.
9. Consider deploying appropriate equipment such as license plate readers, camera trailers, message boards, etc.
10. Discuss the feasibility of deploying plainclothes officers to identify individuals or groups planning violence or looking to incite others.

C. Ensure the agency plan includes post-incident procedures:

1. Initiate a criminal investigation concerning individuals who have violated the law. Utilize the media to help identify suspects, which might deter others from engaging in unlawful behavior at other community events.
2. Work closely with prosecutors to pursue appropriate charges against individuals who have violated the law. Establish a review of recorded surveillance and body cameras to determine if new or additional charges are warranted. Provide thorough documentation and evidence to support prosecution efforts.
3. Conduct debriefing sessions following all significant community events, even those that have not resulted in arrests, assaults, or interruption. Document lessons learned and share best practices with relevant personnel and other agencies.
4. Conduct thorough follow-up investigations and document all investigative actions.
5. Involve Internal Affairs personnel early in the process to assist in mitigating complaints at the onset of the incident.

D. Develop a Training Program:

1. Ensure the agency training program includes consistent messaging from the Chief of Police about how the agency has prepared for such events and a clear direction concerning how such events are to be managed by agency personnel.
2. Ensure that all officers understand the desired level of agency-authorized enforcement of local ordinances and other offenses, especially involving youth. Some officers might believe that they have no authority to address any unlawful juvenile behavior, as many media outlets have reported that police have no options in dealing with youth who violate the law in New Jersey.⁵ However, the agency training program should include guidance concerning the enforcement options available to officers, as described in New Jersey General Directive 2020-12, [Establishing Policies, Practices, and Procedure to Promote Juvenile Justice Reform](#), and the specific agency procedures concerning alcohol and cannabis use in public and by juveniles.
3. The training program should also include details concerning any actions or programs the agency might have developed as part of the Station House Adjustment enforcement option, especially efforts to reduce the frequency or severity of flash mobs. For example, the agency might consider developing, as part of the Station House Adjustment, a program that must be completed that addresses the negative consequences of such behavior.
4. Ensure all personnel understand how to communicate effectively, including when there is a sizeable mutual aid response from other county or state law enforcement agencies.
5. Discuss best practices for managing traffic flow and parking at high-risk locations or areas of planned events to prevent congestion and ensure the safety of participants and pedestrians. It should be discussed that it's likely that masses of young people might flee the area or move from one location to the next, and responding officers should be informed to be alert for this risk.
6. Maintain a visible presence to deter disorderly behavior and enforce crowd control measures as needed.
7. Discuss officer safety considerations, including wearing and utilizing specialized equipment and waiting for backup when appropriate, especially before entering a large crowd without adequate backup.
8. Inform officers of what equipment they should have available, such as shields, helmets, less lethal options, and decontamination equipment. Include in the agency training program a review of the appropriate and lawful use of such equipment and weapons for these types of events and incidents.

- Discuss possible deployment considerations for some equipment typically stowed in the vehicle but might be needed by officers on foot patrol.
9. Ensure officers understand applicable laws such as Riot; Failure to Disperse, Disorderly Conduct, Harassment, Criminal Trespass, and Criminal Mischief.
 10. Develop common terminology as best as possible so all personnel involved understand terms such as Riot or Protest, and discuss in the training program specific use of force applications consistent with the [New Jersey General Use of Force Policy](#).
 - Include specific examples and practical exercises involving teens engaging in unlawful behavior in the agency's use of force training program.
 11. Ambush awareness considerations should be included in the training program. A sample Ambush Threat Plan Policy is available [here](#).

If you have any questions, please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant.

¹Cohen, L. (2024, May 26). *Teen Stabbed, Chaos Breaks Out On Ocean City Boardwalk*. Retrieved from Breaking AC: <https://breakingac.com/news/2024/may/26/teen-stabbed-chaos-breaks-out-on-ocean-city-boardwalk/>

²Katro, K., & Hartman, T. (2024, June 4). *New Video Shows Maybe by Unruly Teens; 12 Arrested After Multiple Fights at Gloucester Township Day*. Retrieved from 6ABC: <https://6abc.com/post/gloucester-township-day-annual-event-disrupted-unruly-teens/14903112/>

³Rickman, R. (2024, June 9). *6 Arrests Made as Unruly Teens Ruin Another NJ Family Event*. Retrieved from NJ 101.5: <https://nj1015.com/6-arrests-unruly-teens-ruin-pennsauken-nj-summer-kick-off/>

⁴6ABC Digital Staff. (2024, May 31). *Ocean City Crack Down on Rowdy Teens With New Curfew, Backpack Ban, and More*. Retrieved from 6ABC: <https://6abc.com/ocean-city-new-jersey-rules-beach-curfew-backpack-ban-underage-drinking-teens-boardwalk/13321459/>

⁵Roman, J. (2024, May 31). *We Need Real Consequences for Unruly Teens on Jersey Shore Boardwalk, Local Officials Say*. Retrieved from NJ.COM: <https://www.nj.com/politics/2024/05/we-need-real-consequences-for-unruly-teens-on-jersey-shore-boardwalks-local-officials-say.html>