



Case Study:

XMAS CRACKER

FESTIVAL



PRINCIPAL
SECURITY CONSULTANTS Ltd



www.guardtec-security.co.uk



The Client



Principal Security Consultants Ltd

Project

Christmas Light Switch On

Location

St Albans City Centre

Dates

November 2015 - present

The Background

The St Albans Christmas Cracker Event is an annual festive gathering that attracts thousands of visitors to the historic city of St Albans, UK. The event features a Christmas market, festive performances, parades, and entertainment spread across several venues over with entire town centre.

With such a large crowd and high-profile activities, security planning becomes essential to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all participants.

Since, the councils event team have partnered with GuardTec Security (GTC) and Patrol UK to handle the planning, execution, and management of security operations.

The goal was to not only prevent any potential security incidents but to enhance the overall experience for attendees by fostering an atmosphere of safety and ease.

This case study explores the process of principal security planning for the St Albans Christmas Cracker Event, detailing the strategies employed, the challenges faced, and the successful outcomes achieved through comprehensive planning.



Objectives

- ▶ To ensure a safe and secure environment for all attendees.
- ▶ To prevent and respond effectively to potential security threats, including crowd surges, theft, and disorderly behaviour.
- ▶ To coordinate with emergency services and event organisers for a seamless security operation.
- ▶ To minimize disruption to local businesses and traffic flow.

Approach

► Risk Assessment & Pre-Event Planning

GTC conducted a thorough risk assessment in collaboration with local authorities and emergency services. Key risk factors included:

- Large crowd density leading to potential overcrowding.
- The presence of high-profile guests, including local officials.
- Alcohol consumption in designated areas.
- Traffic congestion around the event perimeter.

To mitigate risks, GTC developed a security strategy that included:

- Zoned security coverage to assign security personnel to specific areas such as entrances, food courts, entertainment zones, and backstage.
- Controlled entry and exit points into the event space to regulate the flow of people and prevent overcrowding. This included installing vehicle barriers and enforcing road closures to ensure vehicles could not enter the event space.
- Emergency response protocols for medical incidents, lost children, and security threats.
- The set-up of a control room and the procurement of digital radios to ensure open and efficient communications between security officers, event organisers, safety officials and the police.

► **Deployment of Security Personnel**

A total of 40 security personnel were deployed, including:

- Uniformed security officers for general crowd monitoring and assistance.
- Plain clothes covert officers to detect suspicious behaviour and potential security threats.
- Response teams positioned near emergency egress routes and high-risk areas such as street bars for quick intervention in the event of altercations, terrorist threats or other emergency scenarios.

► **Crowd Control & Access Management**

- Bag checks were implemented for anyone entering the event area. Tags were supplied to officers, which were attached to bags that had been checked so officers working across the vast event space knew it had been checked.
- Barricades & designated walking paths ensured smooth crowd movement and prevented congestion.
- Officers were also strategically placed at potential congestion points such as bottle necks, bars or entertainment areas to monitor and manage crowd control.
- Alcohol control measures included wristbands for legal drinkers and security patrols near bar areas.

► **Emergency & Crisis Management**

- First aid stations were strategically placed, staffed with paramedics. A medication emergency process, including zones was created to ensure first responders could be directed quickly to medical emergencies.
- Lost child & missing persons protocol was enacted, with a dedicated reunification point.
- Evacuation plans were clearly communicated to staff, and emergency drills were conducted before the event.

► **Surveillance & Incident Reporting**

- As the event was held in the town centre and CCTV monitoring covered all key areas, providing real-time feeds to the police and the security control centre.
- Digital radios & mobile communication ensured fast coordination between teams and different stakeholders of the event.
- Sequential logs were created detailing hazard, maintenance of security reports, these included lost property and security breaches.

Results & Impact

- ▶ Major security incidents such a bomb threat, have been quickly dealt with a safe evacuation of the site.
- ▶ Swift resolution of minor disturbances, including lost children and minor altercations.
- ▶ Reduced traffic congestion through effective road closures and shuttle bus coordination.
- ▶ Positive feedback from attendees, with 92% stating they felt safe during the event (based on post-event surveys).

Challenges & Learnings

GTC have suggested and worked with council towards many major safety improvements. This has included:

- ▶ The introduction of a staffing matrix based on 'Green Guide' and 'British Standards' principals to ensure the council always has enough security personnel to ensure the safety and security of attendees.
- ▶ Introducing a bomb threat training briefing for all event organisers, staff and volunteers.
- ▶ Widening entry points to improve crowd flow.
- ▶ The placement of concrete barriers to ensure vehicles cannot enter the event space.
- ▶ **Weather Considerations:** Additional covered areas for security teams for adverse weather conditions.
- ▶ **Improved Communication:** A public awareness campaign on reporting suspicious behaviour and that bag checks were mandatory to help security operations and streamline checks.



The Conclusion

The security operation at the X-Mas Cracker Lights Switch-On & Festival has been a resounding success. GTC effectively manage large crowds, prevent security threats, and ensured a safe and enjoyable experience for all attendees. PSC operate on the basis of continual improvement with lessons learned from each event being discussed with the council and contributing to even stronger security measures for future festivals.





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This work was undertaken by Total Security and Cleaning Services Ltd, who changed their name to GuardTec Security and Patrol UK Ltd from January 2026.