

ELECTRONIC GATES

The primary means of unlocking electronically controlled gates is by means of a switch/button in the stadium control room. This is designed to be supplemented by a "fail safe" system whereby any power failure would leave the doors in an unlocked position. The SGSA is, however, aware of an incident where electronic doors were unable to be released from the control room. They had to be de-energised individually by stewards equipped with keys.

This incident reinforces the SGSA view that it would be wholly unacceptable to rely solely on release from a central point, even if the doors concerned were fully monitored by closed circuit television. The SGSA therefore, remains convinced that the safest solution is for spectators to be able to open the doors themselves without having to rely on any club personnel. This would normally be achieved by means of some kind of push bar.

Some electronic systems have doors designed to be pushed open by the pressure of a very limited number of spectators. While such a system might be acceptable as a means of last resort if all other systems had failed, certifying authorities would need to satisfy themselves, by means of appropriate tests, that the pressure necessary to open the gate was not such that spectators were crushed in the process.

The SGSA believes, however, that even if the weight of a small number of spectators could open the exit doors, it is still absolutely essential that there be a steward present with a key at each such door who is capable of releasing it in an emergency and is empowered to do so. Such stewards would clearly need to be fully trained and both competent and confident in their role.

While the possibility of a steward being overpowered and the keys being stolen is recognised, the SGSA does not accept that this danger outweighs that to spectators from the absence of an ability to release the doors on site. Hence the SGSA would only accept that a steward was not required to be present with a key if the doors were fully unlocked and secured only by means of "panic bars".

The question remains whether the presence of a steward with a key as a backup to central control of unlocking provides sufficient protection for spectators. The SGSA regards such a procedure as less than ideal but is aware it is already in use at a considerable number of grounds. It is prepared to go along with this provided that the staffing, method of operation, maintenance and testing of the gates are clearly spelled out in the safety certificate.

In relation to the operation of electronic gates, the SGSA considers that requirements along the following lines are likely to be necessary for the reasonable safety of spectators:

- while the club's operating instructions should clearly specify the duties of gate stewards in various circumstances, these stewards should be specifically authorised to open their gates without further instructions in the event of a sudden local emergency;
- emergency telephones should be provided for instant communication directly between the stewards staffing the exit gates and the operator of the control panel; all such telephones should be instantly accessible by the stewards without use of a key;
- the operation of each gate should be tested both electronically and manually immediately before each match and the results of each test should be logged; the log should also record all other tests, any faults and any opening of any gate while spectators are present;
- the control panel should be located in the stadium control room and should be staffed continuously by a suitably trained and authorised person who should have no other duties;
- the base emergency telephone in the control room should be so positioned that the panel operator can answer it without having to leave his or her post;
- each gate should be clearly marked on both the inside and the outside with its identifying number; this should correspond to the number on the switch on the control panel which releases it.

The SGSA would also expect the certifying authority, before approving such a system, to consider carefully and take full account of the hazards inherent in such a system. In particular, the certifying authority would need to look carefully at what would happen if there was a major emergency and spectators had to force the doors open themselves.