



APOGAEA

2025 Event Closure

What happened. What happens next.

What Happened



2025 Apogaea was shut down midway through the event.
Here's a summary timeline of incidents that resulted in its closure:

1. **2:00 Thursday afternoon** - two participants were gifted 1g of MDMA that tested positive for fentanyl.
 - a. A volunteer notified Apogaea's Incident Command System (ICS) lead who notified the County Emergency Manager.
 - b. When Rangers & Medical were first alerted, the incident was communicated as involving an entire theme camp, and misinterpreted as a potential mass casualty event.
2. **12:15 Friday midday** - a volunteer discovered an undissolved gelcap in their water bottle.
 - a. This tested positive for fentanyl, and for other substances in follow-up tests.
 - b. Because the bottle was on volunteer premises, there was immediate concern that a malicious actor might be targeting Apogaea volunteers.

What Happened *(continued - 2 of 2)*



We recognize field tests are not 100% accurate. But clear evidence of non-consensual drugging significantly escalated concerns.

3. **Friday morning** - Authorities were on the premise to deal with a trespasser
4. **Friday midday** - As a precaution, community water in the nearby Center Camp Café and Ranger Station was dumped.
5. **Friday afternoon** - Per agreement resulting from the previous day's incident, ICS had a narrow timeframe to update the County Emergency Manager (EM). Discussion between the EM and our ICS resolved to close the event.
5. **6:45 Friday afternoon** - this decision escalated into activation of emergency evacuation ICS protocol.
 - a. The event was safely evacuated without incident and evacuation protocol was suspended at 5:00 on Saturday afternoon.
6. To our knowledge, no dosing attempt was successful, nor was anybody harmed physically, and there were zero medical transports from the site during the event.



The decision to close the event was not easy, especially with the multitude of complicating factors.

We learned many lessons and we'll improve how we address different emergency scenarios & cooperative decision-making with local public safety agencies in the future.

Ultimately the welfare of our participants is paramount. We'd rather err on the side of safety instead of risking tragedy.

Please continue reading to learn how Apogaea will adapt moving forward.

What is ICS?



Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized approach to incident & emergency response management.

ICS provides a scalable framework (Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, Communications, Finance/Admin) for agencies to work together, regardless of jurisdiction, to manage incidents like natural disasters or terrorism, ensuring focused command, accountability, and efficient resource use.

An early form of ICS was instituted at Apogaea over a decade ago. 2025 was the first year ICS was escalated to this heightened degree of emergency response.

Our ICS has been primarily focused on protecting Apogaea participants from such hazards as wildfires, catastrophic weather, and mass casualty events.

After Action Review Summary



In the aftermath of the 2025 event closure, key members of the Apogaea team participated in a session to develop an After Action Review (AAR). This review effort was facilitated by a senior member of Burning Man's emergency services team.

The AAR identified several valuable lessons & recommendations for future improvement:

1. The importance of holding an AAR in a timely manner
2. Using ICS-214 activity log format to document incidents as they happen
3. Ensure broader event staff receive ongoing safety training, to reinforce understanding of Incident Command Structure & Incident Action Plan content
4. Ensure safety measures are in place for potential large-scale incidents, including written processes, appropriate event location, appropriate medical staffing & capabilities
5. Development of improved interpersonal relationships & communications
6. Risk mitigation plans need to be fully developed, communicated and executed

AAR Summary (*continued - 2 of 2*)



The AAR identified that “inadequate verification of facts” was a key factor in the initial escalation of ICS response.

Specific next steps recommended by the AAR include:

1. Expand safety training in advance of the event to include senior Apogaea leads
 - a. Training topics to include ICS roles & responsibilities, Standard Operating Procedures for Must Reports (lost child, found child, domestic violence, sexual assault, etc.), stop the bleed & Narcan training, fire extinguisher & fire risks training, carbon monoxide poisoning, radio protocols, evacuation plan, terrorism response and other critical scenarios
2. Improve documentation practices by all ICS staff on duty
3. Assess location improvements and alternatives that can better support mass casualty incidents

Media Report Summary



The closure of Apogaea received significant & immediate media coverage, extending through the following week.

The Apogaea Telemetry team effectively disseminated news of the event closure and follow-up statement on the channels managed by Apogaea.

Over 20 media outlets picked up the story, which was published in local newspapers, alternative weeklies, local & regional television news, and niche publishers focused on festivals and electronic music. One television segment was syndicated to over ten other stations nationwide.

The Good: The narrative was mostly managed by designated Apogaea spokespersons. The County Emergency Manager was a frequent interviewee. Apogaea received favorable recognition for decisive & responsible action, alignment with local public safety authorities, and putting community safety first.

The Not So Good: The media cannot resist sensationalizing stories about drug use at festivals, and this is an unfortunate association for Apogaea that can potentially interfere with future permitting efforts in Las Animas County and elsewhere.

Impact Assessment Summary



A former Apogaea Board member drafted a Crisis Impact Assessment shortly after the 2025 Apogaea closure. Key highlights include:

- After the cancellation of the Apogaea 2015 event (due to neighbor issues and new permitting regulations), attendance at the following 2016 event decreased almost 50%, from 2300 tickets sold in 2015 to 1200 in 2016.
- Volunteer sign-ups similarly decreased by approximately 50%
- Lost revenue over the next 5 years was estimated to exceed \$1 Million.

For the 2025 event, Apogaea offered a partial refund based upon when attendees entered the event. Apogaea refunded \$17,380 to eligible attendees who opted for the refund.

Key recommendations of the Impact Assessment include:

- Focus on rebuilding trust within the Apogaea community
- Improve relationship with Los Animas County officials
- Pursue and evaluate alternative event venues

BAMF Next Steps



Bureau of Apogaea Medical and Fire (aka BAMF) is the volunteer safety team that coordinates with local agencies & professional emergency contractors about safety priorities for the Apogaea event.

Following the AAR, the BAMF team intends to implement the following AAR recommendations:

1. Expand on-site patient capacity
2. Improve documentation of and coordination with nearby external medical & emergency resources
3. Implement ICS tabletop and scenario-based exercises to focus on decision-making, authority transitions, verification, and emotional regulation
4. Develop formal risk matrices for most likely and severe hazards
5. Improve daily written incident status reporting

BAMF Next Steps *(continued - 2 of 3)*



In addition, BAMF intends to support other departments implementation of AAR recommendations which are not specific to BAMF:

1. Clarify harm reduction resources at Apogaea event
2. Integration of contract event security
3. Board convening during event and clarify decision authority
4. Improve radio discipline, protocols and training

BAMF Next Steps *(continued - 3 of 3)*



BAMF intends to also implement the following, which were not recommendations of the After Action Review:

1. Nurture closer relationship with County public safety officials
2. Improve helicopter landing zone (LZ) procedures
3. Improve documentation and accessibility of Fire Art Safety Team (FAST) inspection records
4. Redefine BAMF ICS Lead role to focus on training, documentation and promoting ICS practices across Apogaea community
5. Clarify Incident Command structure during the event

Who are the Rangers



Rangers are fellow participants who volunteer to practice their art of holding on to reality, so you don't have to.

We try to help keep your experience smooth and fun, by helping you handle the hard things large and small.

We try to stay out of the way until you need us, then we emerge from the dust to make it all better.

Rangers: The Catchers in the Rye

I keep picturing all these kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around – nobody big, I mean, except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff. I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I do all day, I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy. But that's the only thing I'd really like to be.

– JD Salinger, The Catcher in Rye

Rangers Next Steps



1. Better equip volunteers with compassionate training & tools to communicate critical & urgent alerts across the event
2. Extend ICS training to broader Ranger leadership
3. Ensure Ranger leadership roles, authority, and escalation pathways are clearly defined & aligned with ICS
4. Improve Ranger operations procedures to ensure better preparation for evacuation scenarios
5. Plan to support ICS volunteer well-being, rest, and feeding

Rangers Next Steps (*continued - 2 of 2*)



6. Collaborate with BAMF leadership to develop more robust ICS plans, including guidance for specific likely scenarios and improved clarity around roles
7. Work with the Board, Mission Control, Ignition, and Theme Camp Leads to provide more transparency into how and why Rangers do our art, and to improve relationships and communication
8. Work with BAMF and Apogaea Board to define procedures to better information sharing across respective incident logs
9. Better communicate Ranger's role as frontline resource to verify incidents & find out facts

Drug Use at Apogaea



1. While we like to think we're at a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) far from Earth, please keep in mind that federal, state & local laws still apply at Apogaea. Reality intrudes...
2. Drug dealers are not welcome at Apogaea, such transactions conflict with our principle of Decommodification, and we have a history of ejecting them without refunds.
3. As your parents or at least your grade school teacher used to say, don't accept drugs from strangers. These days that is a suspect & ever risky gift.
4. If you bring substances for personal consumption, please be smart and test them. We want you to be safe!
5. Apogaea is evaluating ways to improve our harm reduction strategy, stay tuned for details.
6. Perhaps in the spirit of our principle of Immediacy, we suggest you try experiencing Apogaea without being under the influence.
7. Please keep vigilant & be mindful that non-consensual dosing is an issue that impacts Apogaea as well as the rest of the default world. This issue is endemic to all other festivals and bar / club settings. Please... if you see something, say something. Find someone with a radio.

Safety Leadership at Apogaea



While we have Rangers, BAMF and the ICS team at Apogaea, these departments do not have the monopoly on safety at Apogaea. All Apogaea leaders, including Ignition leads, should take an active interest and role in keeping our community safe.

As new safety practices and protocols evolve for the 2026 event, we hope to incorporate theme camps and their organizers into event communication plans. Please stay tuned to learn more as details become available.

Apogaea Board members also plan to participate in harm reduction training as well as ICS courses.

The Board will also work with BAMF and Ranger leadership to ensure more cohesive communication processes during the event.



Be safe!

Stay cool!

It's a wacky world we live in...

And we're all in it together!

