

## Hillsborough 30 years on: Is it safe?

An investigation by ShefNews has unearthed concerns over the safety standards at the Hillsborough Stadium, owned by the Sheffield Wednesday Football Club (SWFC).

'Carl', an anonymous in-house steward who has worked at Hillsborough since February this year, told ShefNews about the lacklustre training he received.

During his first shift Carl realised that ID checks weren't taken seriously. Although he was told to always check the ID of any staff entering the grounds, it wasn't a regular practice.

Carl said: "Anyone could walk into Hillsborough. It would take very little knowledge. There simply aren't IDs for most of the staff

"A man came up to the gate and I obviously had no clue who he was so I said I'm not allowed to let you in unless I see some ID. He replied 'I don't have any ID, that's like gold dust around here.'"

Carl asked a more senior steward if the man could be let in and was condescendingly told the man was catering staff and to just remember his face the next time.

"I was told he was the food guy but all I see is no food and a guy in a Sheffield Wednesday jacket, the same one all of the fans were in."

SWFC's stewarding uniform isn't unique either. With a plain white shirt, smart trousers, polished shoes and a black tie, Carl believes it would be easy to successfully impersonate a steward.

"They don't ID you at the door before your shift. Oftentimes when entering the ground they ask if I'm with Sheffield Wednesday or not, and on one occasion they had a register.

"I said my name and the security checked the register. He said 'yeah, you're not on here, you can go through.'

"I couldn't believe it. It was a register of people who weren't working. I could have said any made up name, and as long as it wasn't on the list, they'd have let me in. The moment I grabbed a stewarding jacket from inside, no one would question me."

Since in-house stewards are on a zero-hour contract, they don't have their shifts on a rota.

ID's aren't Carl's only concern. He also claims that training for in-house stewards is minimal.

Prior to his first shift, the only training he completed was an online anti terrorism course created by ACT awareness E-Learning.

Carl states that you can go back on the test and change your answers to ensure you pass.

“It is a multiple choice test so when you click the wrong answer you can just click another answer until you get the right one and it doesn’t mark you down for it. It’s pointless”

The only other formal training Carl received was an induction on the day of his first shift.

“I must have stupidly misread the email and turned up late,” said Carl.

“I was expecting to be sent home but instead of saying I haven’t had the training; you’re not fit to start work, they just told me to start working in the stands. I had no clue what I was doing.”

Carl showed us the matchpack he was given on his first shift. It stated basic details of fire safety and evacuation information, however, it does not go into any further detail on the next steps stewards should take when this event occurs.

“They announce a code on the speakers, e.g. ‘All stewards can the RED team leader report to...’ as they don’t want to alert and panic fans. RED is your sign to evacuate people, what that process is I don’t know. I don’t know if it means to tell people to go outside or drag people from their seats.”

Considering all the evidence gathered, ShefNews is of the opinion that the negligent security at Hillsborough puts the public at risk. Additionally, anyone with the above knowledge could pose as a steward and slip in to watch a game.

Carl is an in-house steward, but SWFC also outsources Security Industry Authority (SIA) qualified stewards to work at matches.

Outsourced stewards are required to be SIA licensed but in-house stewards are exempt under the law.

Sierra 1 Security Stewarding are a subcontractor security company across South Yorkshire. They provide stewards to both Hillsborough and Bramall Lane.

ShefNews spoke to Greg, another zero-hour steward, who is employed by Sierra. He has worked at both the Hillsborough Stadium and Bramall Lane, among others in South Yorkshire

Greg said: “I wasn’t able to begin work unless I did an induction at their offices. But this wasn’t very useful, they just went through some PowerPoint slides about the importance of stewarding and events when it went wrong, e.g Hillsborough.

“But there wasn’t really any training in crowd management. It’s something you just have to pick up on the job.”

Alex Kier is a football fan, who witnessed the standard of Sierra stewarding at a match between Sheffield United and Tottenham Hotspur.

He said: "I remember getting closer to the gate and a middle aged guy came barging through and he lost his mind, and decided to climb over the turnstiles because he couldn't get his ticket to work.

"There was no resistance or anything from the officials at all. They were kind of oblivious. They tried to maybe put an arm out as a lost cause but they did nothing to stop him.

"I thought y'know there are people there in fluorescent green jackets that are meant to be doing their jobs but they were half arsed and they didn't really have any effect on this guy getting through."

After reaching out to Sierra 1 to ask about the training they provide their staff, however they denied even sending stewards to Hillsborough.

ShefNews later held a meeting with Sheffield Wednesday, in which the anonymous stewards' testimonies were presented.

Richard Stanford, operations manager at SWFC, said: "We know exactly who and when stewards are coming in and we send emails to those who have to reply and the names of the staff are kept for training purposes".

"Stewards must sign in when they are on the grounds and are given a briefing and a matchday package".

"We can not afford to go against the general safety certificate. If we've got over 280,000 visitors coming each year then we must adhere to strict safety guidelines."

Stanford also confirmed that Sierra 1 do in fact work at Hillsborough.

After showing Carl the interview with Mr Stanford, he said: "We only usually sign in at the end of our shifts so they know who showed up and can be paid. Sometimes it isn't even a supervisor taking around the sign in sheet.

"Even if it was, they would still have no idea what my real name is. I could put my name as Barack Obama and it wouldn't be questioned until I'd left the ground after my shift.

"By that point it's too late. What if I wanted to cause harm to people inside the ground? What if I wanted to bomb the place? I could do it and Sheffield Wednesday wouldn't even receive the ticket fee for the trouble."

Carl further noted that the security staff aren't strict with fans either. According to his training, any bag bigger than an A4 sheet of paper isn't allowed into the grounds but he has seen staff turn a blind eye to fans several times.

Mr Stanford told Shef News that SWFC don't put all in-house stewards through the full training system straight away, as most 'only stay for one or two match days', perhaps highlighting a high steward turnover.

Shef News is of the opinion that stewards should receive more than basic training and a short induction regardless of how many shifts they work.

Interestingly, Carl did see a change in the briefings after a safety incident earlier in the year.

“One time there was an EFL regulator who came to check the safety of the stadium and the briefing. It almost felt like a show and they went into all these details of safety that they’ve never done before”.

Carl is referring to the Sheffield Wednesday v Newcastle United fixture held on 7th January of this year that had hundreds of away fans complaining online about overcrowding and unhelpful stewards.

ShefNews can confirm through meeting minutes acquired through an FOI request that Sheffield City Council conducted a review of the matchday operations, which was overseen by the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA).

It found that stewards present that day exceeded the required number by the Safety Certificate and that fan numbers did not exceed the seating capacity. So what went wrong?

Sheffield City Council had reached out to the Newcastle United Supporters Trust which supplied 50 fan accounts of the issues that day. It revealed that stewards were “unresponsive to fans asking for information” and that there was a “lack of directions from stewards”, which led fans to passing through “an already congested concourse”.

It was also reported that tickets to seats that had been netted off were sold, which resulted in fans sitting in others’ seats and causing overcrowding and even disorder.

Sheffield Wednesday was advised to deploy a graduated steward approach and to ensure that their stewards understand the safest access, exit and emergency exit routes and know the layout of the stands in the grounds.

Mr Stanford added: “Along with the safety training that we do we are revising more training programs in august and will be meeting with SAG on the 17th of May”

Carl concluded: ““Safety standards at Hillsborough have to improve. Right now, if someone really wanted to, it wouldn’t be hard for someone to put a lot of fans in danger. It just isn’t good enough and I hope things improve there.”



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