

COVID-19 DERAILS 2021 TRADE SHOW PLANS

An interview with event organizers

By Vicki Jones, Editor



On December 22, 2020, the American Fence Association (AFA) announced that the 2021 Fencetech/NOMMA show, originally scheduled for February 20-23 in Nashville, Tenn., would be cancelled. The following month, the International Door Association (IDA) made a similar announcement regarding the annual IDAExpo slated for April 20-23 in New Orleans, La.

Door + Access Systems interviewed AFA Executive Director Tony Thornton and IDA Executive Director Mike Fischer to learn more about their decisions to cancel these events.

What factors were considered before making the decisions to cancel IDAExpo and Fencetech?

Fischer: In the months prior, previous IDAExpo attendees were surveyed about company travel restrictions and their comfort level for attending. We also surveyed the exhibitors to gather a consensus opinion on attending in-person events.



Fischer

Survey results revealed that travel restrictions for both exhibitors and attendees and concerns related to COVID-19 would impact all aspects of the IDAExpo 2021 and reduce exhibitor, speaker, and attendee turnout.

These effects would have severely limited networking opportunities and would not have offered the IDAExpo experience we had hoped to deliver.

Thornton: AFA worked diligently with the Nashville Convention Center, Nashville Convention Bureau, and city and state health departments to make a decision. Due to the pandemic, they determined we could not meet the proper protocols and health requirements for the anticipated 5,000 attendees.



Thornton

We have already negotiated a return to Nashville in 2024 and possibly 2027. The most

important component was keeping our members and industry attendees safe and healthy.

For a brief period, IDA considered hosting a smaller table-top show. What was the thought process behind this scaled-down event and the ultimate decision against it?

Fischer: We were trying to find a safe solution to network and showcase products. However, it would still have been a safety and financial risk for attendees, exhibitors, and IDA.

The board ultimately decided it was in IDA's best interest to wait until next year. However, IDA plans to offer alternative opportunities throughout this year. Stay tuned for future events to help make up for this loss!

Is this the only year that your associations have been unable to host the show?

Fischer: Yes, this is the first time we have had to cancel an IDAExpo since the show began more than 25 years ago.

Thornton: This is the only year Fencetech has not taken place since the first show in Anaheim, Calif., in 1962. That event was organized by the Fence Contractors Association and was conducted by the directors and members in Southern California.

Did any significant problems result from the decisions to cancel?

Fischer: IDA has the support of our membership on this decision, especially from our exhibitors and suppliers.

Of course, there was some disappointment from those who were excited to attend and connect with professionals in the industry. IDAExpo is part of the association's culture, and it is an experience our attendees look forward to all year. We remain certain of the choice we made for the safety of everyone involved.

Thornton: Our industry partners, exhibitors, and attendees understood why the decision was made. We really haven't witnessed any negative comments or reactions, even considering how much everyone would have liked to attend.

I feel the largest issue is that our industry professionals were not able to network and connect at the event. We are now turning our attention to the 2022 show in New Orleans, La. We feel this might be the most attended Fencetech ever.

Since the pandemic prompted a forced "off year," would AFA or IDA ever consider changing to a biennial format?

Fischer: We are making plans to make IDAExpo 2022 in Las Vegas a momentous occasion for our attendees and exhibitors. That is our focus right now.

Thornton: AFA surveyed Fencetech attendees and found that they would prefer an annual event to network regularly and to learn about new products. They also felt that the education programs are vital to their operations and help them stay on top of necessary business-related topics.

Understanding that exhibitors attending multiple events were looking for savings, we worked diligently to bring industries together for co-located events. In my opinion, these types of co-located events are needed. ■

Editor's note: You don't have to miss out! Learn about the latest company news and all the hot products you would have seen at the shows in our 2021 "No Show" Show Guide. Watch for this publication in April.