Keeping The Mobile Workforce Safe In Our Turbulent Times

Including advice on keeping safe in crowded places/events and tracking employees in a crisis

Security and medical risks to the mobile workforce can occur anywhere and at any time and recent reminders, such as the terror attacks in the UK, Germany and France, have resulted in a sense of increasing challenges, even in travel to places once thought secure. Employee safety and security is never far from anyone's minds and the need to prepare, protect and assist employees whenever and wherever needed, has never been more evident. Not only is it a Duty of Care for any organisation, and increasingly has potential legal implications if employees are not appropriately protected, it is also high on the agenda to help business continuity planning and strengthen business resilience through a protected workforce.

James Wood, security expert at International SOS and Control Risks commented, *"Professionals with a responsibility for the safety of their mobile workforce, have a heightened concern about travel in the current security environment. In the past weeks, we have, naturally, had questions from clients concerned about travel to the UK and other countries in Western Europe. We are advising them and their people that they don't need to change their plans, but they do need to be vigilant. While the probability of being affected directly is still very low, the British and other governments' own assessments indicate that the likelihood of further attacks remains high."*

"As risks are changing, organisations need to take reasonable and proportionate steps to protect their workforce, particularly those away from home on international travel. They should make sure they can quickly identify where their people are and have the means to communicate rapidly with their staff to confirm their safety should an incident occur. Above all, organisations should make sure they make their decisions about business travel from objective assessments based on reliable information, rather than taking at face value everything they read in the news or on social media."

With many organisations increasing their business travel activity[1], keeping informed and taking into account all risk factors will enable business travel to proceed

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successfully, resulting in a protected workforce and business continuity.

James Wood, continues, *"The safety and security of business travellers and international assignees has to be a shared responsibility taken by both the individual and an organisation."*

Challenges To Travel Risk Management

Professionals with travel risk management in their remit have told us the three biggest challenges that organisations face in protecting their mobile workforce are: Education about travel risks, communication during a crisis and tracking travellers[2]. These are vital elements to keeping your workforce safe and an indication of what is pre-occupying managers.

As travel risk professionals are often multi-tasking across a number of business objectives and risk responsibilities are shared across an organisation, coordination (and identifying responsibilities) is essential: whether that is managing additional staff for a business objective or ensuring that corporate data is protected. The impact of this is of course amplified during a major crisis, like an extreme weather event or a terrorist attack which could affect a number of personnel rather than an individual.

In a crisis, preparation and speed are essential factors in dealing with a situation efficiently, from education of the workforce in case of an issue to the on the ground support. For instance, when a business traveller or assignee is attending or arranging an event such as a conference or exhibition they can be prepared in advance with a number of actions they can take and practical advice in case of a security incident at venue:
- Be vigilant but not alarmed
- Know where the exits are in case you have to react to what is a very unlikely event
- Make sure your mobile phone is charged and with you, so you are able to get access to information about disruption or any on-going

Educating employees about travel risks	49%
Communicating during a crisis	47%
Tracking employee travel	42%
Confirming that employees have read pre-travel information	37%
Travel risk policy compliance	31%
Managing a crisis	31%
Business continuity planning	23%
Implementing a travel risk policy	23%
Confirming that employees have taken travel risk training	23%
Understanding legal obligations to travellers	22%
Management buy-in of travel risk policy	18%

incidents, as well as call for help if necessary
- Follow advice from local authorities, and have confidence in our police, intelligence and security agencies to prevent/disrupt or provide warnings
- If anything happens, immediately depart the scent by a direct route in the opposite direction of any threat
- Find a safe location and, once there, move only if you need to find a more secure location
- Immediately attempt to communicate. Remember mobile (cellular) communications networks may be unworkable, either as the volume of traffic increases, or as emergency responders reserve the network for their own purposes: landline services are an alternative
- In the aftermath, make reasonable attempts to account for other members of your party. If you are in a group, stay together
- If necessary, seek medical assistance. Find out where any injured people will be taken and accompany injured friends/relatives to hospital
- Take precautions and plan as much as possible so events can go ahead.

It is also vital that organisations are prepared with a way to locate and communicate with their workforce, identify and arrange any support required, and understand quickly if anyone is unaccounted for — and all at a time of intense pressure. In order to do this, multi-channel communication is key, using a range of two-way communication methods including email, SMS and text-to-speech protocols and provide automated "resend" capability to ensure travellers acknowledge the message/respond to it are essential. As events evolve, access to informed, real time information is vital.

Security Risks Higher On The Corporate Agenda Than Healthcare

Potential terror attacks (71%) have dominated concerns at a global level for some time. This is followed by concerns regarding the Zika virus (49%) and civil unrest (46%), with inadequate healthcare and road accidents both at 15%. However, these lesser considered, but more common, issues should also be taken seriously.

Road accidents are also a major issue and one of the top five causes of medical evacuation. A number of countries showed significant improvement in deaths from road accidents in the past year, but organisations should be mindful that they remain a common major risk.

We also advise that people responsible for travel programmes should not forget their own safety and security when travelling. In our survey, we found that only just over half of travel risk professionals research threats at their destination and only 42% research vaccination requirements, with the same amount researching attitudes, cultures and practices of the local population.

James concludes, *"Organisations need to be prepared to support and protect the workforce with unparalleled advice and assistance. Travel risk management tools & services such are key helping organisations protect their mobile workforce in the most efficient way and mitigate risks to strengthen business resilience."*

"Travellers need to take into account guidance from their organisation, their own government and the authorities in the countries they are visiting, to be prepared in case of incidents, to respond appropriately in the event that they are affected directly, and to expect their employers to contact them in the event of an incident."

References:
[1] *PWC: Talent Mobility 2020 and Beyond*
[2] *International Travel: Risks and Reality: The New Normal for Business is an Ipsos MORI research study conducted among 1,119 business decision-makers across 75 countries. Research was conducted online using representative panels in the period October 6th to October 26th 2016.*

For further information on how to prepare and protect your mobile workforce and international assignees contact www.InternationalSOS.com