

The Evolution Of Duty Of Care: How To Keep Employees Safe During Business Travel

The unprecedented events of the last few years have called for more stringent duty of care protocols within the mobility industry.

With travel still proving challenging this year, keeping employees safe has never been more complex for employers. As organisations across the globe look for new ways to protect their workforce while away on business, employees also have fresh expectations of their employers in a post-Covid landscape - both highlighting the importance of duty of care.

Put simply, duty of care is a company's obligation to take reasonable actions to protect its employees' health, safety and welfare. While duty of care can be reasonably straightforward for businesses to manage in the workplace, it instantly becomes more challenging when travel and relocation is involved. Once viewed as a concern for larger organisations with high-risk travel (such as the shipping sectors), duty of care is today recognised as an integral part of any company travel programme - and businesses should take note.

As someone who has been in the corporate housing sector for over 27 years and most recently with 3Sixty, I have seen the concept of duty of care in the business travel industry continually evolve. But, I would argue that the pandemic has accelerated the significance of duty of care in the global mobility sector. There is no longer room for companies to ignore the overall safety of teams abroad - and with the technology available today, such as real-time safety data and employee housing booking platforms like 3Sixty, there's simply no excuse.

The Impact Of COVID-19

Throughout the last 25 years, many events have impacted and disrupted duty of care, including natural disasters, worldwide terrorism and civil unrest. Each major event has shed new light on the responsibilities of travel decision-makers and the safety of employees, shaping travel programmes and how they deal with travel risk management.

The pandemic has once again drawn our attention to duty of care and what employers should be doing to protect

the welfare of travelling employees. Until recently, business travel was logistically tricky, travel regulations became more in flux, supply chains were under threat and - of course - the media cast a dark shadow on these unprecedented times. Safety has taken on a brand new meaning in corporate travel - so how can companies adapt?

The pandemic has once again drawn our attention to duty of care and what employers should be doing to protect the welfare of traveling employees

Develop Robust Policies For Your Duty Of Care Protocols

Supply chains must have robust strategies that meet the company's objectives and culture around duty of care - and importantly, employees need to understand these strategies and the measurements in place to protect their welfare.

Whereas 10-20 years ago, duty of care was a "nice to have" for companies, today these protocols are critical - and with some uncertainties still present in the business travel industry, employees want actions, not words.

Duty of care programmes must be crystal clear, with transparent plans in place to keep

employees safe, save time, reduce stress and ensure the proper support is in place. Business travellers must feel supported end-to-end, with documented reaction and recovery plans in place, tools to monitor their safety, communication channels and ongoing monitoring.

Use Technology-Driven Solutions

As I mentioned, technology has supercharged the evolution of duty of care. Tapping into these platforms and resources is key to ensure the safety of business travellers:

1. Corporate housing booking platforms:

As the lines between business and leisure continue to blur, short-term rentals are becoming increasingly more accommodating to business travellers who expect a home away from home. However, relying on individual property owners to meet duty of care standardisation is a risk when the welfare of employees is involved. Corporate decision-makers cannot guarantee or control property standards, facilities or professional 24/7 support for employees, which is why using corporate housing providers is essential. 3Sixty, for example, has a network of accommodations with over one million properties in 60 different countries. Yet, each property meets our benchmark duty of care standards and is vetted daily against different criteria, such as their financial health and business practices. Red flags arising from this vetting are instantly escalated to a member of our team to investigate.

2. Real-time safety data: Employers and employees can (and should) use hyper-local data to make smart decisions in real-time. Working with corporate housing providers who have partnerships with safety measurement platforms allows business travellers to measure their personal level of safety with a mobile phone or smartwatch. This provides them with the most accurate safety and security data in a range of sub-categories, from official sources such as UN, WHO and the FBI, together with other AI analysis of media headline sentiment.

3. Identify location risk and property risk for natural disasters: The total cost of climate-related and weather disasters in 2021 was \$148 billion - the second-worst year on record. Climate and weather disaster risk is set to become a larger part of duty of care, and more travel decision-makers will need to consider these risks in their programme. Platforms like Augurisk helps identify property risk for flood, wildfire, earthquakes, storms and crime in the US, using its proprietary scientific and machine learning models, enabling travel decision-makers to make more informed decisions about where they send employees.

Acknowledge The Growing Scope Of Duty Of Care

Employee safety has always been a priority, but now the well-being and mental health of the employee is equally important, together with the financial stability of the supply chain.

The scope of duty of care is growing, and more stakeholders are responsible than ever before, including human resources, risk managers, HSE professionals and the C-Suite. Ultimately, duty of care is everyone's responsibility, from the employer to RMC to the aggregator to the supplier.

To give an example, when booking temporary accommodation for a relocation, you would historically have considered the safety of the property location and neighbourhood, then the physical security of the building. Now, with the challenges hospitality providers have experienced during lockdowns and international borders closing, you also need to consider businesses' short- and long-term viability. If it doesn't survive, the employee will be stranded.

Each corner of your duty of care programme needs to be watertight and the supply chain fully vetted to ensure every person involved is someone you trust to meet the gold standard of duty of care.

Treat Duty Of Care As A Continuous Process

Duty of care is a living, breathing concept. As we've seen over recent years, it is continuously evolving, growing and changing - but the foundation remains the same: to protect the welfare and safety of employees.

With the assistance of technology, travel decision-makers have more data available than ever before to help them make informed decisions and ensure duty of care is upheld - as well as a global network of vetted, compliant accommodations to ensure employees feel safe and comfortable while out of the office for work.

With the right protocols, safety measurements and tools in place, travel decision-makers can ensure duty of care is upheld when employees are travelling for business. While you can't control the whole experience of a business traveller, what you can control in many ways is the customer experience - where they stay, the tools they can access, and the support on offer.



ROBYN JOLIAT

Robyn Joliat, CCHP, is the Chief Technology Officer for 3Sixty, part of the Reside brand portfolio, and is tasked with creating and evaluating innovative new technologies that drive forward the company. Prior to this role, Robyn has spent over 27 years in operations, revenue generation, supply chain, and product development at leading corporate housing brands ABODA by Reside and BridgeStreet Global Hospitality.

SAVE THE DATE

The 2023 Global HR Conference

FOR GLOBAL HR PROFESSIONALS ONLY

is taking place on

Monday 5th June 2023

at The Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, London

Please join us for our annual Conference that covers various topics that are key to Senior Global HR Professionals who manage their company or organisation's Global Mobility.

This event is FREE TO ATTEND

To register your interest in attending please email:

helen@internationalhradviser.com

and you will then be emailed the formal invitation in April next year.

We look forward to seeing you then.

Best wishes and Happy New Year!

HELEN ELLIOTT, FOUNDER & PUBLISHER, INTERNATIONAL HR ADVISER