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Duty of Care and Travel Risk Management: What does a mature program look like?

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Introduction

As companies increasingly globalize their operations, the need for protecting both travellers and their employers by developing and managing the optimal travel program is growing. This paper will layout the elements to consider when building a travel policy and some tips for how to identify the right model for your kind of business.

Background

There is a difference between duty of care and Travel Risk Management (TRM). The former is about the legal and moral responsibility to provide protection for travellers and their employers. As well, TRM is the program of specific actions that deliver against that responsibility. There has been much publicity around terror related incidents though the risk to travellers is often unrelated to terrorism. According to the US Department of State, of the reported deaths of US citizens abroad between 2013 to 2016 the highest proportions were caused by vehicle accidents, petty crime, and health incidents (excluding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). Terrorism incidents took the lives of 0.01% of Americans out of country during those three years.

Nevertheless, terrorism incidents have increased the attention given to travel programs. TRM is not always the responsibility of the travel manager, but it is the most likely department to assume the lead role. According to BTN's 'Taking Travel Risk Management Survey' of 229 travel buyers, travel managers and corporate safety & security managers, Feb. 2-28, 2017, the highest proportion (26%) of survey respondents identified travel management as the responsible department. Some of the other departments identified are corporate security, HR, and executive management.

So What Does a Travel Manager Need to Know?

At a high level there are two major elements to understand. One is the model that can be used to build, maintain and improve a TRM. The second is to be able to ask the right questions of your travel management company (TMC) in an RFP.

One: The Model

The following is a simplified step by step approach to building and refining a comprehensive travel risk management policy and process within your firm.

Step 1: Identify the Stakeholders

Most firms consider the primary stakeholders of a travel risk management program as the Travel Management department, the traveller, Human Resources and / or the Executive team. Other departments may be Health and Safety, Legal and / or Corporate Security.

If you are the travel manager it is vital that you understand the degree of cross department cooperation and responsibility for your travellers.

Step 2: Travel Risk Assessment

This step is actually three phases:

1. The formal identification of the destination specific risks of the places your firm typically sends employees. That is can you identify the primary risk categories per country? These may be geopolitical, criminal, cultural, or climate related risks for example.
2. Consider the traveller's profile: Is the traveller fit and well enough for the specific trip? What data can you collect from your travel supplier partners for compliance to company policies around number of nights overseas for example?
3. Consider your travel suppliers: have they been vetted to be able to deliver an emergency response? Do you know the kinds of ground transportation the traveller will be using?

Step 3: Prepare Specific Trip Risk Assessment and Mitigation

We recommend identifying the top destinations your company travels to, and then establish a grading system. That system may be a matrix that asks what is the likelihood and the impact of a situation developing. Then grade those destinations according to the findings. This will help you mitigate risks per destination.

This is where compliance to travellers using authored booking channels becomes so important. If there is a situation, your TMC can identify where travelers are at moment's notice.

Step 4: Specific Trip Monitoring

Our experience is that about half of companies do not communicate the risks, and the risk management plan, to the traveller before those journeys commence. Set up a threshold where risky trips can be identified in advance then communicate the plan to the traveller. Ensure your TMC and its partners can deliver timely notifications.

Step 5: Traveller and Data Management

Formal knowledge of where your travellers are is the only way to be sure you can help them in the case of an emergency. What is the rate of compliance to formal booking channels? Do you have a third-party aggregator for the informal booking channels? How quickly can you assemble that information? What data can your TMC provide and how long will it take?

Step 6: Practice, Track, and Improve

If you have an emergency, we recommend a debrief afterwards. Can you identify specific incidents and discuss findings internally? Can you discuss specific incidents with your TMC and garner new data and knowledge? Did all the stakeholders collaborate?

Two: The RFP

Given that your TMC touches most of the steps itemized above we offer a few examples of questions to consider using in your RFP:

1. What are your traveller tracking and notification procedures?
2. What technology tools are available to support emergency evacuations?
3. How do you track and report on incidents?
4. Provide examples of a recent geopolitical situation:
 - a. For example, with the recent events in _____ how you were you able to locate travellers there?
 - b. How can you deliver information to travellers holding future bookings who have not yet travelled?
5. Which third party vendors, such as ISOS and ANVIL do you have contracts with?
6. How do you stay coordinated on data that needs to be captured and reported?
7. How do you proactively track and pre-trip report on the number of employees travelling on the same flight?

The Future

All indicators are that legislators in more jurisdictions around the world will be looking to ensure that employers are providing adequate protections for the travellers. Additionally, these issues will take an increasingly prominent role in employee recruitment and retention strategies. Companies are advised to be proactive in the development of policies and programs for the protection of their employees.

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