



A LONG WAY FROM HOME:

EMERGENCY RESPONSES FOR INTERNATIONALLY MOBILE EMPLOYEES



Booking flights, finding a rental property, searching for schools, opening bank accounts, shipping your pet – these are some of the common elements of an international assignment that both the employer and employee take time to research and plan for.

What may not get as much attention is what happens if an emergency occurs during an assignment. Unfortunately, natural disasters, geopolitical conflicts, terrorism, pandemics, personal injury, and unforeseen accidents do happen.

As a Mobility professional, you may know the latest accommodation options in Singapore or your company's travel policy for Europe; however, would you be so confident when it comes to reacting to emergency situations? Would your assignees know where to turn?

We have partnered with International SOS, a leader in international health and security risk management, to share insights and guidance to help you plan and prepare for how you would respond to these unexpected emergencies.



We will explore the following:

PLANNING

How proactive planning can help you respond effectively in an emergency.

PREPARATION IN PRACTICE (CASE STUDY)

How does International SOS support its own employees?

RESPONSE

In the event of an incident, some of the smaller actions can have the biggest impact at a critical time.

FAILURE TO PREPARE

Some of the risks and impacts to both company and employee of failing to have any plans or procedures in place.

CLOSING TAKEAWAYS

Some key questions to help you start thinking about how your own Mobility program would respond in an emergency.

PLANNING



As with the more regular elements of an international assignment, proactive planning can also help a business respond effectively to an emergency. Some key planning elements for an employer to consider include:

UP-TO-DATE DOCUMENTATION

Stay on top of your employees' required immigration documentation. Ensuring valid travel documents are in place allows them to cross borders swiftly in the event of an emergency.

MEDICAL AND HEALTH

Anticipating potential health issues and preparing accordingly is crucial. Ensure that your employees understand how their private healthcare works and what support they would receive in an emergency – before the emergency happens!

CLEAR AND WELL-DEFINED PROCEDURES

Having well-defined procedures for responding to emergencies or evacuations can significantly improve response times and outcomes. Clear procedures help ensure the company can respond operationally, as well as supporting the employee's personal wellbeing.

PARTNERSHIPS

Mobility teams should establish strong relationships with partners such as travel companies and support services for employee well-being (including mental health and post-trauma support).

EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

Companies should educate employees about the key risks associated with their assignment locations (health, security, etc.), as well as guidance on managing these risks.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS

Having plans in place for medical evacuations is crucial. Practicing these plans, identifying the crisis team, defining roles and responsibilities, and rehearsing different scenarios are key to success.

By their very nature, emergencies occur unexpectedly: having clear, well-practiced procedures ensures everyone knows what to do and how to respond. Whilst the above list is not exhaustive, it covers some of the main areas which will help build a robust response plan.





PUTTING PREPARATION INTO PRACTICE

How can companies put vigilance and preparation into practice? Let's look at an example.

International SOS have employees deployed to over 45 different countries at any given time. Whilst this coverage ensures International SOS can provide essential support to clients in a timely manner, it also requires that they have rigorous procedures in place for supporting their own staff before and during deployment. This is important for all deployments, whether to locations that are usually deemed safe and with a good level of healthcare, or to those recognized as difficult or remote.

Let's look at an example scenario of how International SOS helps to prepare their employees for deployment overseas:

Sarah, a dedicated and skilled doctor working for International SOS, is being deployed to a location in Papua New Guinea known for its rugged terrain and limited medical facilities.

As is the case with some of International SOS' locations, Sarah will be the sole medical professional on-site to support the client community. If something were to happen to her, it must be considered that there wouldn't be additional experienced medical personnel available to assist or prepare her for evacuation.

If Sarah had a chronic disease requiring medication but did not disclose it before her deployment, this could jeopardize her health as medications are often difficult or impossible to source in high-risk environments. This could lead to the company needing to evacuate her.

Other scenarios might require evacuation to the nearest country with medical facilities appropriate to the situation. Being in Papua New Guinea, Sarah could be evacuated to Australia for anything from a relatively routine procedure, such as a root canal, up to a more severe case, such as emergency treatment for a heart attack.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SARAH'S CASE STUDY – PREVENTING AND REDUCING MEDICAL ISSUES

Deploying employees to high-risk and medically under-resourced areas requires particularly careful preparation. Before sending someone like Sarah, International SOS has a stringent pre-deployment process to help prevent and reduce medical cases arising in the host location, including applying their own Fit-For-Work assessment.

International SOS' Fit-For-Work assessment includes the following:

- **Ensure Employee Health:** Confirming that employees are healthy and fit for deployment reduces the risk of medical emergencies during the assignment.
- **Mitigate Risks:** Identifying potential health issues before deployment helps prevent complications that could arise in locations with limited medical facilities.
- **Maintain Operational Efficiency:** Healthy employees are more capable of performing their duties effectively, which is crucial for International SOS to support their clients in crisis situations.

RESPONSE



By their very nature, accidents and emergencies take us by surprise: effective planning can help businesses ensure they have a framework in place. However, if an emergency occurs, the business may also be the first point of contact or the key coordinator for an employee and their family.

In these situations, it is often the small gestures that can make the biggest difference.

UPDATING FAMILY/NEXT OF KIN

In the event of an accident, the business may be the first to be informed. Does the business know who to contact on behalf of the employee? Has the employee provided a preferred order of communication for their family or next of kin? It cannot be assumed that the employee would have their phone or the relevant contact details with them, let alone be in a state to be able to provide them.

MEDICAL SUPPORT

If the employee is taken to a local hospital, there may be limited language capabilities, and the employee may be uncertain of what is going on. As a part of their emergency preparedness, the company may want to review their medical policies. In the immediate aftermath of an incident, it may be advisable to relocate the employee to a private hospital that may be more suited for international patients.

SUPPORT FOR UNACCOMPANYING FAMILY

The employee's family may need to travel to the host location as a result of the accident. Depending on the home and host locations, arranging and paying for such a trip may not be possible for the family. Does your company have the ability to arrange and support the family's travels to and accommodation in the host location?

REPATRIATION

If the employee needs to return to their home location due to the incident, consider support in arranging and/or paying for their travel home. If an employee is in the host location on an assignment, it should be fairly straightforward to initiate an early repatriation process and to reinstate their role in their home country. If the employee has transferred permanently, the company may wish to find a role for them in the home location from a goodwill perspective, where possible.



FAILURE TO PREPARE

THE POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF AN INADEQUATE INCIDENT RESPONSE ON THE BUSINESS

Whilst there may be push-back on allocating time to focus on effective pre-emergency planning, it is worth considering what the potential costs would be of being caught unprepared – not only for the individual employee, but for the company's reputation.

PERSONAL IMPACT

The employee involved in the incident, as well as their family, will have gone through a traumatic experience. If they have to go through it alone, with potentially little support, this could make it much harder for the employee and their family to overcome and move on from the incident.

REPUTATIONAL

There could be a wider reputational issue if the company fails to respond to or assist the employee, and the matter gets publicized.

LEGAL

If there is a reputational issue, the company's legal team may also need to become involved. This will require time and resources from the business.

LOSS OF TALENT

The impacted employee may resign if they feel like they have not been supported by the business. This will be a loss of talent, and the business will lose on the investment made during the employee's time in the host location.

IMPACT ON FUTURE EMPLOYEE MOBILITY

Other employees may be less willing to undertake international opportunities if they become aware of an incident and what they deem to be an inadequate response from the employer.



IN CONCLUSION

As Mobility professionals, so much time is focused on – and success is measured by – the planning and executing of an assignee’s physical move to their new location. In many instances, we do not discuss or plan how we would respond to an unforeseen assignee incident.

Whilst it may not be feasible to review and update all policies, there are a few takeaway points which may be worth considering:

- Have there been any incidents in the past involving assignees?
How did your company respond?
Were there any learnings?
- Does your company have an existing response framework – particularly listing key contacts and key responsibilities?
- Who are the main stakeholders in your company that would need to take action in the event of an assignee incident?
Is everyone aligned on how to respond?
- Would there be any areas you would look to improve if you were to apply an example or case study against your existing process?

These events wouldn’t occur in an ideal world, but given the increasing mobility post-pandemic, it is unfortunately more a case of **when** rather than **if**.

By taking the time to think about these points and putting some proactive steps in place to ensure efficient and effective action, you will be well-placed to support the business and, most importantly, your mobile employees.



Focused on Workforce Globalization, AIRINC provides compensation insights, allowances, technology, and advice to facilitate global and domestic mobility since 1954. AIRINC has a distinct approach – Listen, Partner, Deliver.

With contributions from:



A pioneer and industry leader in International Health and Security risk management, helping companies to protect their international workforce. International SOS has over 12,000 employees across the globe, providing 24/7, 365-day support.

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