



TRAVEL WITH
CONFIDENCE

Worldwide Travel and Emergency Assistance

November 2006

Tracking Travelers in Emergency Situations **Tom Winn, Special Projects and Consulting Manager** **ASI Group**

By the second day of the invasion of Lebanon in early July 2006, companies were starting to take an “inventory” of where their employees were located. Many people were known to be working or visiting family in Lebanon and communication with them was difficult. Within a few days, much of southern Lebanon was, in effect, a war zone, and it was almost impossible to make contact through traditional means.



Businesses with emergency plans were able to quickly identify which employees were in Lebanon. Those without continuity plans had to spend valuable time contacting and locating their people. For all companies, it became imperative to assess the combined risk and the possible ways to bring their employees home.

The way businesses view their role in employee safety was significantly changed by the events of September 11, 2001. It was one of the first events in recent history to highlight the need for traveler tracking. With many individuals unaccounted for in the aftermath and communication systems overloaded, corporations did not know where or how to contact their employees.

Businesses should plan for more than just terrorism or acts of war. Natural disasters can also affect business continuity, as experienced each year with hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes. These

events can easily cause security concerns as basic supplies including food and water are in high demand. Additionally, locating and communicating with travelers becomes difficult in the aftermath.

As outlined in the above examples, the ability of companies to quickly identify the whereabouts of employees has proven time and again to be a necessity. Whether it is a single employee or a group of workers, knowing the location of each individual is critical in an emergency. As a result, organizations are taking many steps to ensure that the travel schedule of all employees is accessible in the event of a crisis. Today's technology allows for more precision and reliability than ever before.

Travel Tracking Software

More and more frequently, a company's travel department is the first to be called during an emergency. As a result, many have invested in Travel Tracking programs. These programs interface with the corporate travel management program, allowing companies to quickly obtain a list of employees that are in a specific location. This list can contain specific information, such as flight times, flight numbers, and the hotel of the traveler. In the event of a regional disaster, identifying the travelers potentially affected can save hours or even days looking for an individual.

At minimum, an organization should have a "checkout" procedure for every traveling employee. Before an employee leaves for a trip, they should give a detailed itinerary to their supervisor along with a recent copy of their passport. It should be relatively easy for a supervisor to identify the general location of their travelers.

Cellular and Satellite Phones

Once you know the location of your travelers, how do you contact them? Preparing for security or weather events in advance and outlining immediate reaction and communication protocols is important. While many companies specialize in such services; how do you decide which solution is best for you?



It is important to know the strengths and weaknesses of cellular and satellite phones. Many companies feel a false sense of security in providing cellular phones for their travelers. Today, companies that have cell phone programs are switching to phones with GPS technology to assist in locating the user. However, availability of the network can pose a problem. Immediately after Hurricane Katrina, cell phones were difficult to use and, as Rita approached the Texas Coast, the local system was overburdened. Significant use and a large number of Katrina evacuees caused the cellular network in the area to become inoperable. Fortunately, most cellular providers restored operations in damaged areas within days following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

On the other hand, satellite phones can be useful in the event of a regional disaster, but they do have their limitations. For example, many satellite phones work very poorly in buildings, and signals are often interrupted as nearby trees and power lines can cause interference. A user should familiarize themselves with these limitations before they leave for a trip.

A Local Provider

Many companies exist to help organizations with corporate security plans and communications options. Such third party providers are generally able to react much faster to an emergency than a company acting on its own. Third party providers monitor safety and security in locations that may have travelers. In the event of an emergency, such providers can help ensure that your travelers are accounted and cared for.

Having an established relationship with a local provider can be invaluable during an emergency. Working exclusively with a reliable provider allows you to foster a relationship with them, which could make a difference in a crisis.

At a Minimum

Even organizations with limited funds can establish a travel tracking system. At minimum, travelers should leave a copy of travel papers (passport, itinerary, hotel number and location) with their supervisor or trusted family member. Upon arrival to their destination, travelers should regularly check in with their family or supervisor. During each call, the traveler should outline the next day's agenda with names, times, locations and phone numbers when possible. They should also establish a time for the following day's check-in call.

The following resources are available on the MEDEX Assistance website. Simply click the links below to download and use these forms.

[Pre-travel checklist](#)

[Emergency contacts](#)

Establishing a minimal protocol provides a starting place for employees and family to locate travelers in a time of emergency. More comprehensive programs are available through MEDEX Global Group, Inc. If you are interested in implementing a traveler tracking program for your employees, or would like to speak to an expert about how you can improve the safety of your international travelers, [contact us](#).