



Safety in the global village

Keeping your staff healthy and safe abroad

More and more businesses are expanding into international markets and, at the same time, there's a growing awareness of how important good health and safety management is to the success of organisations. This means that many employers and health and safety practitioners are faced with new challenges:

- how will you apply your organisation's health and safety standards if you or your employees are working abroad?
- how will you manage the effects of a different working culture and environment?

Health and safety consultants may see an increase in their international client bases, posing similar challenges. This guide, and the separate checklists for employees, offer basic information for those placing people abroad and for those who are posted – in the long or short term.

Introduction

Find out more



Where you see this checklist icon, turn to *Your guide to safe international travel*, our sets of checklists for employees, for more details about what to include in your information for staff.

If you're planning to expand your organisation's operations into another country, there's a lot to consider. Creating and satisfying a demand for your products or services is just the beginning – you need to manage the safety of your staff and your assets abroad. Issues facing safety practitioners or the people they're advising include:

- deciding whether staff need to be posted abroad and, if so, how many
- learning how best to travel to the country and what life will be like
- planning for your organisation's transition to or operation in another country
- finding specialist support abroad
- learning what the country's health and safety priorities are
- establishing how local laws and standards compare with those in your home country
- reviewing your organisation's staff policies
- dealing with cultural and language difficulties.

Safety in the global village consists of two documents. The first – this one – is aimed at safety practitioners and the managers and directors responsible for staff who travel overseas on business. It looks at commonly encountered issues, highlighting personnel hazards and associated risks. There's also a working abroad action plan (pages 10–11). Once you've been through the action plan and agreed what you need to do, you can include the results as part of a risk assessment for individual travellers.

The second document – *Your guide to safe international travel* – consists of a series of checklists for travelling employees. It gives advice on what they need to do before they go, as well as how to stay healthy and safe once they've arrived. It's available as a separate download and as part of this employers' guide.

Both guides cover all kinds of international business travel, from a trip lasting a few days to a longer placement lasting months or years.

Your international policy

International policy

You may want to consider whether:

- the workplace itself is a reasonable place to send staff
- the building your staff will be using is suitable
- the employee knows what risks to look out for and how to minimise them
- the employee is competent to do the work you're asking of them
- your staff are appropriately supervised locally
- you know enough about the working environment and risks involved.

Health and safety standards vary between countries and regions. This is a significant challenge for multinational organisations that want to maintain consistent operational standards. Most UK employers have a health and safety policy which states their general duties and responsibilities under UK law – but a well-governed organisation sending employees abroad should also have an 'international policy' that defines a level of care and maintains it effectively.

It's important to consult the right people in your team about your

international employment and travel policy before it's finalised, especially those with international experience (possibly from earlier in their careers) who can share best practice and lessons learned. The policy should cover both brief trips and long term assignments.

The policy may simply state that the organisation's 'duty of care' standards in the home country will extend to wherever the employee travels on business, and that it will provide information, training, support and equipment to protect the employee's health, safety and welfare at all times.

Looking at country-specific risks

When operating a business in another country, you must always meet the health and safety standards of that country. Although the European Union (EU) is at the forefront of developing and adopting a common framework of health and safety laws across its member states, even here there are still differences between countries. You may find it helpful to refer to the International Labour Organization's guidance – see www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/cis/index.htm. Aim to reduce risk to your staff as much as possible – you need to be able to justify your actions through your risk assessments.

Before deciding to enter a country on business, explore what risks may be present and what you can do about them. For long term postings, on top of obvious health and safety risks,

consider certain social issues, because they can affect employees' overall adjustment to life outside their home country and therefore their mental wellbeing. You may need to think about:

- the economy, currency movements, management of expenses and any bribery culture
- religious differences and religious laws (for example, laws on dress code and alcohol consumption in some Muslim countries)
- social structure and the employment of women and children
- living standards, salary payments and tax
- industrial, employment, fire, and health and safety law
- educational facilities
- coverage and reliability of phone, email and postal services.

International risk assessment

Some points to consider:

- whether your international policy covers all the people, places and activities involved
- the risk profiles (see page 4) of the individuals you're sending overseas (and of their families, where relevant)
- political, medical and security risks of the countries involved
- infrastructure and contacts in the countries involved
- cultural awareness and training
- travel planning and vaccination schedule
- personal safety and security training
- communications arrangements
- details of accommodation
- travel within the country, including driving
- information management
- contingency and emergency strategy and response
- debriefing strategy.

Before your staff travel

Preparation for travelling

For help preparing overseas trips, try contacting:

- business travel agents
- airlines, shipping lines and rail companies
- your own country's consulates
- foreign consulates and embassies in your home country
- large international hotel chains
- the government department responsible for foreign affairs, eg the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK (www.fco.gov.uk) or the US State Department (www.state.gov)
- private security organisations
- organisations with branches in the target country
- Chambers of Commerce
- your country's government department responsible for trade and industry (eg www.berr.gov.uk)
- world satellite television (eg BBC World, CNN, CNBC)
- local newspapers and business publications
- the International Meteorological Office
- people in your organisation who've had experience of the country you're visiting.

Using mobile phones abroad

If you're planning to give your staff mobiles to use abroad, check that:

- they're suitable for international roaming
- the handsets will work in the relevant country
- you've given your staff a suitable adaptor for the charger
- there's enough credit on the phone to cover international calls.

You could also consider adding services to your subscription, including Internet access, information by text message, built-in personal digital assistants and email/fax facilities.

When travelling or working abroad, employees must be aware of important differences that will influence their activities. The risks of foreign travel generally stem from the language barrier, the traveller's unfamiliarity with the location, health risks, local customs, internal security or political instability, and transport infrastructure. Most first-time business travellers will think as tourists and not understand that business travel is different and has different risks. As a responsible employer, assess each country your employees visit for these risks. Make sure that business travellers get good advice and the support they need to protect themselves.

Risk profiles

A risk profile is an individual risk assessment for an employee who's going to be working abroad. As well as general travel-related elements, it should include specific personal circumstances that could affect their health and safety while abroad, such as disabilities or medical conditions.

Insurance

You need to arrange suitable insurance to cover 'routine' travel risks, including flight problems, lost luggage, additional transport costs and medical emergencies (personal accident, local medical costs and repatriation). Agree

the amount of cover with staff in line with your policy, taking account of any international agreements on medical care. For example, EU citizens can use a European Health Insurance Card when travelling in the EU to access the same level of medical care that citizens of the country they're visiting are entitled to. They do, of course, still need travel insurance.

Clothing and luggage

If your staff need special clothing or equipment, you must pay for it. You can get advice on what your employees may need from travel agents and specialist outfitters.

Medical and dental checks

Your government can tell you whether your staff will need any vaccinations or anti-malaria tablets. If they do, you must pay for them. Sort out vaccinations well in advance – some need to be given several weeks before travel, others can't be given together, and they may produce side effects that need treatment. Some countries require proof of vaccination before they'll let travellers enter. Find out more about vaccinations and health from:

- the UK Department of Health, www.dh.gov.uk
- the US Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov/travel.

Communications

Consider how best to keep in touch with your travelling employees. This depends on the business you're in, but as a minimum you should be able to contact your staff at specific times, and they should be able to communicate with their base when they need to.

Arrange a timetable for your staff to contact you to let you know they're OK. Make sure they get in touch even if they have nothing to report.

Many countries don't have good communication networks in outlying

areas, although even the less well-developed countries have reasonable networks around larger cities. If you give your staff a company mobile phone, make sure it'll work in the country they're visiting. Get advice from travel companies or mobile phone service providers.

Satellite phones are an alternative to the standard mobile system.

Although they're expensive, they allow a person or vehicle to be tracked and give coverage in areas where standard mobiles don't work.

Living and hotels

Around a third of expatriate assignments are unsuccessful. A common reason is that employees don't adapt well to their new environment. Staff posted overseas need to become familiar with local living arrangements, such as housing, schooling, utilities and banks. There are specialist companies which can help plan, prepare and support

relocation arrangements – get more details from the Association of Relocation Professionals' website, www.relocationagents.com.

It's best to book hotels that have been recommended. If possible, find out about the area and building so your staff know what to expect when they arrive.



See 'Once you're there' checklist 3a

Personal health

International travel can expose your employees to a range of health hazards, including from food, water, the climate and endemic diseases. The outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) around the world showed that it's also possible for illnesses picked up abroad to be spread very fast by international air travel. It's vital to consider appropriate health measures well in advance of setting up an organisation overseas, or at least two months ahead of a staff visit or posting. You may need to get specialist medical advice on personal health issues, including:

- local medical contacts (doctor, hospital, dentist, clinic)
- personal medical and dental insurance
- facilities and local agency contacts for medical evacuation
- providing personal medical kits
- a traveller's health guide (eg *Health advice for travellers*, www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4123441)

- health briefings and checks before departure
- how to deal with the problems of long flights, such as joint and muscle ache, swollen ankles, increased risk of deep-vein thrombosis, ear pain and disrupted sleep patterns
- vaccination records
- post-visit debriefings and health checks.

A medical check-up is a good starting point – it's essential to identify any potential current healthcare risks.

Encourage your staff to book appointments with their doctor, dentist and any other relevant practitioners (including your in-house occupational health team, if you have one). The advice they get should take into account any existing medication and how travelling may affect health problems. Get specialist medical advice on extreme climate precautions (eg for travel in the tropics or polar regions) at least six weeks before travelling.



See 'Personal health' checklists 2a–2e

Personal medical kits

Depending on the destination, you may need to provide:

- a basic first aid kit
- isotonic drinks or tablets
- water purification tablets or filters
- sun protection
- diarrhoea treatment
- insect repellent
- a mosquito net
- anti-malaria drugs
- antihistamine tablets or cream.

If hospital standards are low, you may also need to provide a sterile medical equipment pack containing:

- hypodermic syringes
- dressings
- sutures
- blood plasma
- single-use thermometers.

Culture

Wherever you're sending employees to promote your business or sell your products, you need to consider the country's culture. Understanding the obvious pitfalls of language and translation, as well as customs, mannerisms, beliefs and personal presentation, not only reduces the risk to your employees – it can also help your business.

In many countries, religion is a major influence on how people get things done. Make sure you brief your staff on religious differences, customs and laws so that they can avoid causing offence.



See 'Once you're there' checklist 3b

See 'Once you're there' checklist 3d and 3e



Local travel

Plan in advance how your staff are going to get around when they arrive. Driving in some countries can be particularly risky because of poor roads or a high crime rate – in these cases, hire a reliable local driver if possible. If you can, book hire cars and drivers in advance.

Remember to arrange transport for your staff from the airport. Ideally, get someone from the local office to meet them personally, but if this isn't possible, ask the local contact to recommend a taxi firm.

See 'Once you're there' checklist 3c and 3f



Personal security

There are a number of security risks your staff could face when working abroad, ranging from violent attack and kidnapping to extortion and petty street crime. It's advisable to arrange security briefings for first-time travellers. Outline the recommendations in a security policy or plan. Briefings should be low-key, balanced and carefully constructed, with an emphasis on avoiding risks. They should cover:

- the security background of the country and the immediate region of the site or business area
- the cultural background (including religious influences and customs) and standards of social behaviour

- crime and the police (including how to approach the police, what they'll listen to, the extent of their influence and local power)
- personal security awareness and procedures at work, at home and on the move
- security resources that residents can call on.

Training in risk prevention (avoiding being a target and limiting exposure to theft, mugging and con tricks) not only boosts the traveller's confidence, but is essential for minimising risks to your staff while they're abroad.

Personal security training topics

- preparation and packing
- planning journeys
- planning where to stay
- diary and communications
- medical and first aid considerations
- departure planning
- dealing with opportunistic and targeted bribes and extortion
- avoiding drugs and contraband
- safety and security at the destination airport
- how to meet a contact driver
- public transport, hotel shuttles and taxis
- security in hotels and residences
- driving, car-jacking and road rage threats
- muggings, including pre-emptive measures
- harassment by street traders, vagrants and beggars
- dealing with the local embassy or consulate

Crisis management

Disruption to business can be caused by natural disasters, accidents, outbreaks of disease, political unrest, crime or economic instability – and they can all lead to emergency situations. For your business to deal with a crisis effectively, you need to develop workable strategies, policies and systems to minimise the impact. These should include training and regular reviews to make sure they're still effective.

Follow these simple steps:

- analyse your business
- assess the risks
- develop the strategy
- develop the plan
- rehearse the plan.

Developing a business continuity plan will help you to avoid financial losses, protect your employees and your property, meet legal requirements, avoid loss of market share, and reduce negative publicity.

And finally...

To make sure your organisation's international safety strategy is effective, you need to learn from past trips and change the policy to take account of any lessons learned. It's

therefore vital to hold debriefing sessions for staff who've returned from overseas trips or postings, so that they can contribute to your future policy and training provision.

Useful contacts and information

Many of these sources of information are intended for UK residents and companies based in the UK, but their recommendations will often be valid across the world.

Business and travel

Association of British Travel Agents Ltd (ABTA), 68–71 Newman Street, London, W1T 3AH
t +44 (0)20 7637 2444
www.abta.com

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Travel Advice Unit, Consular Directorate, Old Admiralty Building, London, SW1A 2PA
t +44 (0)870 606 0290
f +44 (0)20 7008 0155
www.fco.gov.uk

Meeke K. *Rough guide to safer travel*. Rough Guides Ltd, 2005. Freely available online at www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/RoughGuideToTravel,0.pdf

UK Trade and Investment Enquiry Service, Kingsgate House, 66–74 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6SW
t +44 (0)20 7215 8000
www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk

Medical and health

Department of Health, Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2NL
t +44 (0)20 7210 4850
www.dh.gov.uk

Lea G and Leese J. *Health information for overseas travel*. The Stationery Office, 2001. Freely available online at www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/hinfo/travel02.htm

Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad, Moorfield Road, Yeadon, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS19 7BN
t +44 (0)113 238 7500
www.masta-travel-health.com

National Aids Trust (Advisory Service), New City Cloisters, 196 Old Street, London, EC1V 9FR
t +44 (0)20 7814 6767
www.nat.org.uk

National Travel Health Network and Centre, Hospital for Tropical Diseases, Mortimer Market Centre, Capper Street, Tottenham Court Road, London, WC1E 6AU
t +44 (0)20 7387 9300
www.nathnac.org

Terrence Higgins Trust Helpline (advice and counselling on HIV/AIDS issues), 52–54 Grays Inn Road, London, WC1X 8JU
t +44 (0)20 7831 0330
www.tht.org.uk

Travel Health Information Services, 20 Oaklands Way, Hildenborough, Kent, TN11 9DA
www.travelhealth.co.uk

World Health Organization factsheets available from www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/en/

World Health Organization. *International travel and health 2005*, WHO, 2005. Freely available online at www.who.int/ith; priced hard copy available from the Stationery Office, www.tso.co.uk

Health and safety

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Gran Via 33, E-48009 Bilbao, Spain
<http://osha.europa.eu/en>

Health and Safety Executive
Infoline t +44 (0)845 345 0055
www.hse.gov.uk
Priced publications available from HSE
Books: t +44 (0)1787 881165
www.hsebooks.com

International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS)
www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/cis/index.htm

International Labour Organization,
4 route des Morillons, CH-1211
Geneva 22, Switzerland
www.ilo.org

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). *Safety when working overseas*. NERC Health and Safety Procedure no. 18, 2002. Freely available online at www.nerc.ac.uk/about/work/policy/safety/documents/procedure_oversea.pdf

Culture

Executive Planet – information on international business culture and etiquette
www.executiveplanet.com

Lonely Planet Travel Guide Books,
72–82 Roseberry Avenue, London,
EC1R 4RW
t +44 (0)20 7841 9000
www.lonelyplanet.com

Communications

Mobileshop.org – the mobile phone user guide
www.mobileshop.org

Directgov: Using your mobile phone abroad
www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/TravellingAbroad/BeforeYouTravel/DG_4016880

Crisis management

Continuity Central (business continuity news and information), Portal Publishing Ltd, PO Box 1393, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD1 9TN
t 0845 644 1110 (from UK)
t +44 1484 300750 (from outside UK)
www.continuitycentral.com/region.htm

Preparing for Emergencies, Civil Contingencies Secretariat, 10 Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AE
www.preparingforemergencies.gov.uk

Swiss Re. *Preparedness: basics of business continuity management*, 2001. Freely available online at http://swissre.com/resources/1da59980455c55279567bf80a45d76a0-Preparedness_e.pdf

Working safely abroad – action plan

This action plan isn't exhaustive, but it offers you a starting point as you develop your international travel policy.

About the country your staff are visiting

Topic	Yes/No	Action/notes
Are there formal political links with your country?		
Is there political or social instability?		
Are there notable religious customs or laws?		
Are there notable legislative differences?		
Are phone and postal systems reliable?		
Is the transport system reliable?		
Is there a drug problem or bribery culture?		

Preparations before departure

Topic	Yes/No	Action/notes
Insurance policy		
Does it provide a replacement car?		
Do your staff have individual risk profiles?		
Does it cover medical bills?		
Does it include air ambulance cover?		
Does it cover return flights for employees' families?		
Does it cover repatriation if workers die or are injured?		
Medical provision		
Have your workers had medical/dental check-ups?		
Have they had any necessary vaccinations?		
Have you prepared a medical kit for them to take?		
Do they have supplies of prescription drugs?		
Do they have spare glasses/lenses and solution?		
Finance		
Have you given your staff an expenses advance?		
Do they have the right currencies?		
Do they have credit/debit cards?		
Have you arranged to settle bills through a travel agent?		
Personal security		
Have you given a security briefing?		
Do your staff have a named contact to meet?		
Do they have instructions to contact base regularly?		
Do they have details of high-risk areas to avoid?		
Have they had risk avoidance training?		
Have you produced an itinerary for them?		

Preparations before departure (continued)

Topic	Yes/No	Action/notes
Accommodation		
Have you used it before or has it been recommended?		
Have you made a security check?		
Have you checked its quality?		
Travel within the destination country		
Have you given your staff a cultural briefing?		
Do they need an international driving permit?		
Have you arranged a hire car (and driver)?		
Do they have health and safety awareness information?		
Contingency and emergency arrangements		
Have you done a threat assessment?		
Are there plans to cover flight delays?		
Is a mobile or satellite phone available?		
Have you set up a 24-hour contact schedule?		
Do you have local medical contacts?		
Do you have an incident management team?		
Do you have emergency evacuation plans?		

When your staff return

Topic	Yes/No	Action/notes
Have you debriefed your staff about their trip?		
Have you shared any lessons learned?		
Have you updated your policy on that country?		

Acknowledgements

We're grateful to George Wedgwood CFIOSH, who produced the 1999 guidance *Safety in the global village – travelling, living and working during a short- or long-term international posting*, which this document updates and replaces.

Revision

This document was last updated in August 2008.

IOSH

The Grange
Highfield Drive
Wigston
Leicestershire
LE18 1NN
UK

t +44 (0)116 257 3100
f +44 (0)116 257 3101
www.iosh.co.uk

IOSH is Europe's leading body for health and safety professionals. We have nearly 33,000 members worldwide, including 13,000 Chartered Safety and Health Practitioners.

The Institution was founded in 1945 and is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that sets professional standards, supports and develops members and provides authoritative advice and guidance on health and safety issues. IOSH is formally recognised by the ILO as an international non-governmental organisation.

**Institution of Occupational Safety
and Health**
Founded 1945
Incorporated by Royal Charter 2003
Registered charity 1096790

