

# Meetings and Global Duty of Care



## What You Need to Know Now



A meetings industry whitepaper presented by

**starCITE**<sup>®</sup>

**Global Duty of Care** is a company's obligation to protect its employees, travelers and meeting participants from risks. These risks can be related to injury, sickness, safety, security, health, travel.



In the past few years, jarring television and web pictures flashing from across the globe seem to appear with more frequent regularity. The subjects: all manner of natural and man-made disasters. There was the massively destructive March 2011

earthquake and tsunami in Japan, political uprisings in Egypt, Libya and other Arab countries, and devastating tornadoes which wiped out entire towns in the U.S. In what turned out to be a false alarm, Europeans braced themselves for a repeat of the spewing volcanic ash in the skies over Europe which created havoc for the travel industry in 2010.

As a meetings manager, these kinds of natural and man-made disasters can keep you up at night. Tragedies and tense moments for people on the other side of the world quickly translate into your responsibility and your problem. In addition, your company is obligated and may be legally bound to provide care to stranded employees or even attendees. When an emergency happens, you need to know how to:

- instantly find out if your organization has attendees in the areas affected;
- communicate with internal departments, meeting planners and others about stranded travelers;
- coordinate assistance.

Most major companies, especially those which do business in certain higher risk parts of the world, have a Duty of Care program – but does that program apply to meetings? Creating a Duty of Care program as part of your organization-wide Strategic Meetings Management Program (SMMP) can help you respond to challenges arising from emergencies that impact your attendees. Increasingly, meeting managers the world over are investing their time and collaborating with internal departments and preferred suppliers to create such programs.

## Duty of Care: a Growing Awareness

Having a Duty of Care program in place is becoming a necessity. A growing number of governments around the world and some states in the United States now have legislation in place that obligates companies to provide Duty of Care to business travelers. In addition, many companies consider it part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.

The most well-known of these new laws is the UK Corporate Manslaughter and Homicide Act which stresses that all companies should make systematic assessments of health and safety risks. In addition, it makes clear that the workplace (and thus liability for employee welfare) is not restricted to regular company locations.

In the U.S. and Canada, employees who are citizens or legal residents injured while temporarily outside of the territory (usually for a maximum of 90 days), may be covered by Workers' Compensation laws.<sup>1</sup>

Today's meeting manager has a wider field of responsibility than ever before, as their companies expand beyond home bases to penetrate global markets. About half of all meeting managers in a recent U.S. study of over 600 managers and planners indicated they had responsibility for meetings and events both in the U.S. and throughout other regions.<sup>2</sup>

Another important reason for companies to have a plan in place is that meetings and events are once again on the rise. And with more travel and meetings taking place, the odds are greater that a crisis will take place.

In the *2011 IMEX Global Insights Report*, 58% of those surveyed predicted an increase in the number of meetings in 2011, versus 33% who said so about 2010 events.

**After the 2010 Iceland volcano crisis, the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) surveyed its membership about their greatest challenges dealing with the crisis. The results:**

- Just under half had a crisis plan in place to rescue stranded travelers;
- 22% were equally concerned about stranded travelers, cancelled meetings, reduced sales calls and increased expenses;
- 29% were forced to cobble a plan together from other crisis plans.

<sup>1</sup> For example, while most U.S. states' Workers' Compensation laws do not have extra-territorial application, there are exceptions. Some states make a business traveler exception for employees traveling abroad to further an employer's business. Source: "Duty of Care of Employers for Protecting International Assignees, their Dependents, and International Business Travelers" (International SOS, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> PhoCusWright's Groups and Meetings: Driving Success in Business Travel's Most Complex Segment, 2010

## Lessons learned:

**“We weren’t as good as we thought we were as we were”**

—Meeting Manger of European-based global pharmaceutical company who managed 750 displaced employees during the Europe’s 2010 ash cloud crisis.

“One of the issues that we experienced during the Ash Cloud crisis was not having a complete and accurate list of traveler mobile numbers within the traveler profiles. One of the lessons learned was that it hampered our ability and speed to quickly reach impacted travelers and pro-actively send out information. It meant we were flooded with incoming calls to our call centers and crisis team.”

## Important Elements of Duty of Care

It is mostly in specific regions of the world where citizens worry about the threat of volcanoes. Perceptions changed in April 2010, when huge clouds of ash spewed 30,000 feet into the skies over Europe, disrupting the trans-Atlantic flight corridor for nearly a week and stranding *10 million* air passengers. Suddenly, many companies found themselves struggling to deal with the crisis. A story in *The Wall Street Journal*<sup>4</sup> reported that Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd. canceled its board meeting because most members couldn't reach their destination, (Virgin Group’s executives were stranded all across the globe) and the company set about rerouting flights. Meanwhile, foreign directors of BP PLC, the British oil giant, who had met in London days before flight cancellations, were stranded in the U.K., with no way to return home.

“The most important aspects of a Duty of Care policy are to set up procedures to find out where your people are and then to contact them and bring them to safety,” said Kevin Iwamoto, Vice President, Enterprise Strategy at StarCite, Inc. “In order to achieve this, you need a comprehensive, enterprise-wide view of meetings and events that your attendees are engaged in, regardless of their departments.

“Are your employees traveling on business visiting clients, attending conventions, internal sales meetings, or incentive trips? You need to know all this before you can take any kind of action.”

## Putting a Duty of Care Plan Together

Creating a Global Duty of Care policy – along with the procedures that map out how to quickly organize and carry out rescue efforts – will give you a blueprint for responding to crises that affect your employees and attendees, no matter where they are in the world. Here are five steps to help you create a Duty of Care program within your meetings program:

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<sup>4</sup> <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704246804575190692150273242.html>

**Collaborate.** Start by communicating to key stakeholders in your organization – such as managers in HR, Security, Risk Management and Legal – to find out what Duty of Care programs already exist, to give them the big picture of how your meetings programs fit in, and identify where gaps exist. In addition to your plans to set a company-wide Duty of Care program for Meetings, learn other departments’ procedures and experience. Ask collaborators: “How would you handle this situation?” Armed with that knowledge, you can build a detailed plan that spells out how to access employees’ whereabouts, which suppliers to turn to for help and how to communicate with and, if needed, aid employees should they become impacted by an emergency event.

**Coordinate with Suppliers.** Ask your preferred suppliers whether they have their own contingency plans for an emergency. Do they have a plan to manage reservations in order to house stranded guests? When negotiating with potential vendors, pursue guarantees that your travelers can receive special consideration during emergencies. Make sure that this interaction with suppliers is built into the planning of every meeting.

A good Duty of Care plan for travel management should cover the following strategies and tactics:<sup>5</sup>

Duty of Care Strategy	Mitigation Tactic
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Research health, safety and security risks of travelers’ destinations.
<b>Strategy/Planning</b>	Investigate the costs and benefits of insurance for travel, emergency medical assistance and kidnapping.
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Ask attendees to sign risk assessment forms, declaring that they know, understand and accept the risk of business and meetings travel.
<b>Travel Planning</b>	Implement procedures to follow in the face of a natural or man-made crisis.
<b>Communication/Education/Training</b>	Communicate to attendees the importance of adhering to travel and risk management policies; provide guidance on how to book travel or where to seek assistance, especially when web access to company Intranets is down and phones are out of service.
<b>Tracking</b>	Know your attendees’ itineraries.
<b>Controlling</b>	Take regular surveys and study the data to assess whether your organization is meeting its Duty of Care legal and ethical responsibilities.
<b>Assisting</b>	Provide access to a 24-hour hotline for advice and assistance.

<sup>5</sup>Source: “Duty of Care of Employers for Protecting International Assignees, their Dependents, and International Business Travelers” (International SOS, 2009)

**Use enterprise meetings management technology.** Your meetings management technology should be your main ally in successfully – and more easily – carrying out Duty of Care operations, no matter the scenario. Pick a technology that can meet all global meetings needs – for example being able to handle regional process variations so all of your global data is centralized. That will allow you to easily track meetings around the world, store attendees’ contact data, provide the ability to communicate via the web (for example, on registration sites) and link to an online travel agency (OTC) to make it easy for meeting planners or attendees to quickly rebook flights. When sourcing, a flexible and robust e-RFP tool will also make it easier to query hotels on their disaster contingency plans, as well as what kind of extra support they can offer you and your travelers.

**Get Senior Executive Support.** Just as you would when creating and implementing a strategic meetings management program (SMMP), build support among senior executives for your Duty of Care program. Present a cost-benefit and risk analysis that shows the cost of instituting and paying for emergency rescue and extra hotel nights versus the harm that can befall your employees or attendees in a disaster if they’re left unaided. Consider, too, the damage that can be done to your brand and reputation.

**Communicate.** Use your company intranet, meetings technology portal page, emails, town halls and other forums to communicate the details of your Duty of Care plan. While your travel managers, meeting planners, and preferred vendors, will be working to get travelers home safely if an incident should occur, employees and attendees nonetheless need to know that there’s a plan in place and what their roles and responsibilities are. In your communications, you should spell out what actions attendees should take if they have to go it alone, as in some emergencies web access and phone service may be unavailable for a period of time.

“When it comes to communication methodologies, we like to think of them as the DNA of every aspect of your crisis planning. You want to think about and think through how to prepare travelers and groups and how you will maintain communications with them before, during, and after the crisis has occurred.”

—Stacey MacAlister, CCTE, GLP  
Managing Director,  
Sales and Client Management  
North America Corporate Division  
JTB Americas

## How Meetings Technology Supports Duty of Care

- **Enterprise System:** Supports all meetings activity across divisions to avoid data silos.
- **Meeting Request Form:** To aid your search for attendees in a troubled area, make sure request forms include information on destination, city and time period.
- **An Orderly Schedule:** Keep your electronic meetings schedule updated on any changes (for example, event requests to crisis areas) so that you can quickly move to keep employees safe.
- **Registration Details:** Include attendee details like name, mobile phone, emergency contact information, and when attendees confirm, include an attachment that describes procedures to follow in an emergency.
- **Mobile Attendee:** Can be used to instantly relay new information directly to attendee's mobile devices.
- **Travel Integration:** You can get a comprehensive view of attendees' flight information to find out if they're in harm's way.
- **Robust Reporting:** enables you to create business intelligence that gives crucial detail on where attendees are during emergencies.

Study your data. Understand what analytical data and reports are available to you through your meetings technology – waiting until a disaster strikes is too late. Your meetings technology platform should allow you to instantly run reports on your attendees' whereabouts and search by region. This capability will be a huge help in accommodating stranded travelers and bringing them home.

We live in an unpredictable world, and it is a tough job to keep on top of global events that may affect your attendees. But with a well designed Duty of Care plan and the right technology to empower it, you can be more prepared. Nothing less than your attendees' safety – and the reputation of your company – is at issue!

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**Visit [www.starcite.com](http://www.starcite.com) for more information about meetings management technology that captures attendee data and tracking and to connect with experts who can help you create Duty of Care programs for your meetings.**

StarCite, Inc. provides a technology platform that makes meetings and event planning, booking and management simpler, easier, and more cost-effective for corporations, hotels, venues and meetings suppliers worldwide. StarCite delivers visibility, cost savings and control over meetings spending for businesses and enhanced revenue opportunities for suppliers. Through Web-based, on-demand technology, StarCite automates and supports every key element of the meetings planning and procurement process: planning, budgeting, buying, attendance, payment, and results measurement. Using StarCite's proprietary online marketplace, meetings buyers can connect and conduct business with over 83,000 hotels, venues, destinations and suppliers globally. StarCite is based in Philadelphia, PA, and has offices worldwide.