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Quick Response to an International Emergency Would your Firm be ready if you got the call?

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As worldwide natural disasters appear to be on the rise, the chance of a current or potential client contacting you to assist them internationally increases. GHP was recently faced with a situation of this type and by having an International Project Management Checklist in place, was able to guarantee a quick response for our client.

Traveling abroad can be challenging to say the least, and unlike working in the United States, you face more and different challenges. Below is a checklist of items to consider in your travels to alleviate delays.

Safety: First and foremost be aware of the situation you are heading into. Is social unrest prevalent? Your health, safety and life take precedence. Work site contacts, quick Internet research, and U.S. or local media may aid in determining this.

Work Equipment and Customs: Most work equipment should pass through most Customs agencies. If questioned, be prepared to offer an unscientific explanation. Also, it is helpful to have copies of equipment manuals attached to your equipment.

Declaration of Purpose to Customs: Some countries can be touchy if you are there to work. Most countries provide a generous length of time you can be in their country working, while others have strict and regimented laws. A quick visit to www.travel.state.gov should clear up any questions you may have. If available, registering with the local U.S. Embassy before your departure is an additional safe bet.

Currency and Credit Cards: Familiarize yourself with the exchange rate. Being able to compute quickly can save some heartache. Some countries accept U.S. currency in addition to their own. Knowing exchange rates is crucial when trying to understand on-site project budget input and output. Most current cell phones have a currency exchange function to assist in conversions. You should also check with your business credit card provider for confirmation that your credit card will work in the country being visited.

Communication Back Home: Before you depart the U.S., it is important to establish a mode of communication to your point of origin. Contact your cell phone provider to make sure this is an option and confirm that e-mail will be available. If your last resort is carrier

pigeon and/or smoke signals you may want to postpone the trip until more reasonable communications can be established.

Communication in Country: If you are lucky, the country you are visiting will have English as a second language, and locals will be able to communicate at varying degrees. If not, some planning should go into designating an English speaking person on-site, or hiring a local interpreter prior to departing the U.S. Miscommunication could result in mismanagement of work time and misunderstandings with receiving and giving instruction from your client or local contractors. Work-related documents received and/or reviewed may also be in a different language.

Culture, Materials and the Local Work Force: Dealing with work forces in other countries is often different than in the U.S. Cultural observations, such as holidays, as well as work attitudes must be taken into account. Materials needed for a project may take weeks to acquire where in the U.S. it takes only days. Accomplishing project goals with local work forces will undoubtedly take longer than in the U.S.

Governing Body and Applicable Regulations: An important thing to remember; U.S. Laws and Regulations do not apply outside of the U.S. domain. For instance, in the U.S., OSHA may require a myriad of rules and regulations for an employer on a particular subject; in another country, a less stringent or stricter set of rules and regulations may apply to the same subject. In most cases, what is being observed, recommended and concluded should align with local laws and regulations. Some research before departing the U.S. is recommended. If you have a U.S. based client, they should be made aware of this fact as well.

Adaptable Power Sources for Your Equipment: Power requirements differ in countries outside the U.S. Laptops, work equipment and cell phone chargers will be affected negatively if proper adaption is not accomplished. Electronic stores usually sell kits of multi-country adaptors to bypass this issue.

Available Package Shipping Options: Having a package shipped to you overnight within the U.S. can prove to be a luxury not available abroad. Check with preferred shipping providers to identify availability and any known problems in shipping to and from the U.S.

Additional Exit Fees: Some countries require an exit fee to leave their country. It is important to understand whether this fee can be charged to a credit card or if it is a cash only payment.

Although disasters are unlikely to strike, it's important to be prepared. With a little education and effort, the proper preparation gives your firm the confidence to respond in a timely manner to an international request.

About the Author:

Mr. Garza has seven years of experience in various aspects of the environmental industry that include, conducting numerous inspections for the determination of asbestos-containing materials, the development of abatement specifications for the removal of asbestos-containing materials, and the development of asbestos operation and maintenance plans. He has conducted OSHA awareness training courses; numerous microbial investigations

with an emphasis on causation, visual and analytical inspections for the purpose of developing Microbial Remediation Plans. He has also conducted numerous remediation projects from the selection of the contractor to the receipt of satisfactory post remediation samples and closeout reports. Mr. Garza can be reached at (210) 392-1863 or kgarza@ghp1.com.



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