

EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS

We see an increased impact of extreme weather on international travel, particularly hurricanes and tropical storms.

There was a very significant level of damage in the hurricane season of 2017 in the Caribbean, which fortunately was not repeated in 2018. However, what was significant about the 2018 season was that hurricanes appeared to affect locations not usually associated with such events: Hawaii, the west coast of Mexico and the north-eastern coastal states of the USA, with evacuation orders in place for a number of these. The 2018 Pacific typhoon season also reinforced the impact of tropical storms, with a number of disruptive severe tropical storms, such as Malikisi, and typhoons including Mangkhut, which caused at least 134 fatalities across the Philippines, China and Taiwan.

This highlights the need for individuals to build flexibility into travel plans, and for institutions to be adaptable, with clear, well-rehearsed decision-making and response plans. Our 26 Assistance Centres, staffed by full-time professional medical, security and logistics specialists, work 24/7, 365 days a year to continuously monitor conditions and situations around the world, ready to mobilise resources wherever our clients need them. Besides our Pre-trip Advisories, our digital platform and solutions such as our Membership Portal, Assistance App and TravelTracker also help our clients and their employees to manage the associated travel risks.

Case study: destruction in the Americas — an intense hurricane season

When Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria struck in the fall of 2017, they brought widespread damage, disruption and fatalities to parts of Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and numerous islands in the Caribbean. With the storms severely impacting our clients' people and their operations throughout the region, International SOS and Control Risks stepped in to help.

The situation

Many of our clients found themselves stranded in locations with limited shelter, food and water. Many required evacuation, but were faced with narrow windows of opportunity to move, given the back-to-back timing of the storms and their unpredictable trajectories. Both in the lead up to, and the aftermath of each of these storms, the situation was stressful for our clients. They were concerned about the deteriorating security environment, widespread flooding and heavily damaged infrastructure. Power, potable water and telecommunication network outages, along with the shortage of medication and other essential supplies, made the situation even more difficult to manage. Our clients needed our help.

How we supported our clients

Actionable insight and advice: from the early onset, our Regional Security Centre in Philadelphia closely tracked the weather systems, sending out an alert as soon as the first storm, Hurricane Harvey, started to form. Over the next four weeks, we published approximately 100 alerts, including Special Advisories, on Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.

Crisis management and 24/7 assistance: as soon as Hurricane Harvey made landfall, International SOS activated a Crisis Management Team, which managed the communications and casework that supported clients impacted by all three hurricanes. Our Assistance Centres supported more than 10,000 related calls globally.

On the ground response and support: we deployed multiple Incident Management Teams, comprised of medical and security specialists, to Florida, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico to support our clients on the ground. Our teams delivered vital supplies including food, water and medicine.

Evacuation support: we facilitated the evacuation of 365 individuals, as well as ten pets, from hurricane impacted zones, assisting them with onward transport, hotels and other immediate logistics.