

## Japan Earthquake: The Aftermath - a case study



On March 11, an 8.9-magnitude earthquake off the coast of Japan caused multiple large-scale disasters. The earthquake triggered a tsunami killing over 12,000 and 15,000 missing. In addition to destroying roads, housing and communications networks, the tsunami damaged the Fukushima nuclear power plant, forcing a state of nuclear emergency to be declared. This initial natural disaster widened, quickly becoming a medical-related crisis. "A natural disaster, followed by a medical disaster, is a unique one-two punch," said Robert Quigley, M.D., D. Phil, Regional Medical Director, Americas, International SOS. In the immediate aftermath, International SOS activated a global Crisis Management Team (CMT) within our network of alarm centers, including Tokyo. The alarm centers responded by providing medical assistance, and with its joint venture partner, Control Risks, offered travel security advice.

While Tokyo was left largely unscathed, there were strong aftershocks. Rolling blackouts left millions without power. Bullet and commuter train services were cancelled or delayed and so were flights to Narita International Airport due to radiation fears. During this time of uncertainty, calls to International SOS alarm centers increased by nearly

250 percent as members requested advice, assistance and support.

When the earthquake struck, approximately 45 percent of International SOS' clients using TravelTracker, an online solution that tracks and communicates with travelers, had employees working or living in Japan. While most were not in the area affected, these organizations had many questions regarding the health and well-being of their staff. We helped these employers in two key ways:

- 1) **Provided timely, comprehensive information and advice.** Of the more than 2,000 cases we managed globally, 80 percent were for medical and security information and advice.
- 2) **Supported evacuation requests, including movement within Japan.** Findings from a survey that was distributed during a client webinar on March 17 to the more than 600 attendees revealed that 40 percent of respondents arranged for commercial transportation for their staff and only 18 percent of the attendees indicated that they evacuated their employees.



## Accessing trusted information in a time of uncertainty

Within days following the earthquake, International SOS and Control Risks launched a comprehensive members-only website. As the situation remained fluid this site was continuously updated with vital information 24/7, allowing members to learn about medical risks and risk mitigation, procurement and the use of iodine prophylaxis, food and water concerns, and advice from a radiation epidemiologist. By serving as a centralized repository of credible data, this website enabled companies to provide reliable information to their employees and make informed decisions throughout the crisis.

In addition, International SOS communicated to clients through daily email alerts, webinars and special advisories. Upon request, organizations could also receive employee information sessions conducted by International SOS doctors to address health concerns. Crucial to our advice was that organizations defer travel to Tokyo and that employees move to a more conservative distance of 80 km from the Fukushima nuclear facility.

## Lessons learned: crisis planning is critical even in low risk environments

"As a modern G8 nation, Japan is normally a safe place to live and work. However, even in low risk countries, organizations

need to have tested crisis management and business continuity plans," explains Michael Hancock, Group General Manager, Assistance Worldwide, International SOS. To ensure duty of care, employers require resources and systems to be in place to locate and communicate with employees that work in conjunction with assistance programs. There is also a need to access trusted sources of information to make timely decisions and execute plans.

## The facts

- International SOS handled over 2,000 cases relating to the events in Japan
- 80 percent of those requests were for accurate medical and security information
- 275 commercial and charter flights were arranged for members
- 26 Temple University students were evacuated by charter to Hong Kong
- The Japan crisis website receives over 2,000 visits per day

"Amidst the chaos during my travel to the airport to return home, I lost contact with my mom. International SOS was able to reach me and give my mom relief by letting her know I was safely on my way."

- Christina Foss, Elizabethtown College student

Note: Top left photo compliments of Christina Foss