
Time to go

In the face of earthquakes, nuclear leaks and political upheaval, organisations have to know if, how and when they need to move their people.

The evacuation of 150 British oil workers from a remote area of Libya by the SAS served to underline the risks many face when working abroad.

The operation was part of a wider move to evacuate British citizens from the North African country, which has been in turmoil since the uprisings in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt. The British embassy has been closed, the ambassador has left.

Oil giant BP, which only resumed operations in Libya four years ago, suspended operations and moved to evacuate 40 expatriate staff and their families, who were mostly based in the capital, Tripoli. Norwegian oil company Statoil, also said its non-Libyan staff working in the country were to be evacuate.

And of course it was not just the energy companies that were required to move quickly to protect their people. Mike Davies, Global Director of Public Relations at PwC, says: 'We're keeping a very close eye on a variety of countries in the Middle East and North Africa and we're taking different steps in consultation with our people there. Obviously there's heightened security around our buildings and in some circumstances our offices are closed, we're asking people to work from home and avoid troublesome areas. We're also arranging for expats, if they so desire, to leave the country along with their families until the situation stabilises and settles down.'

As the events unfolded, many multinational companies would have been turning to their business continuity plans to ensure they would be capable of reacting to a rapidly deteriorating political situation in the North African and Middle East regions. They would have been asking whether it was wise to allow staff to remain on the ground, and they would have been asking their security advisers for the latest assessment of risks. All would have been keenly watching developments through the world's media while at the same time heeding advice issued by government departments such as the UK's Foreign Office, other European governments and the US authorities. When would be the right time to go?

And just as the multinational companies would have begun to feel on top of the situation, the world witnessed in real-time the impact of the massive earthquake, tsunami and nuclear leaks in northern Japan. Again, the companies needed to quickly assess the appropriate course of action for their staff, what the risks were, and indeed what their liabilities were.

You can read the full version of this article in the Summer 2011 edition of *Hourglass* magazine, which will be published in June.



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