

# international benefits



the world is becoming a smaller place. People are traveling for business and pleasure. Companies

are selling products overseas, even establishing offices on other continents. It is estimated that 65% of U.S. based companies trade internationally and in 2005 there were 152 million international business trips. In 2008, international tourist arrivals reached 924 million worldwide.

While you may not always have a legal obligation, as a business owner, is it your responsibility to make sure your employees are aware of the issues associated with traveling abroad? It's estimated that 80% of U.S. business travelers believe their company has a legal obligation to ensure their safety while traveling internationally. In fact, 52% of all employees would consider legal action if not supported properly while traveling.

How do you know if you have adequate insurance coverage while traveling overseas, whether for pleasure or company business? Many U.S. domestic carriers do not offer coverage abroad. Even if they do offer coverage in other countries, often times you must pay the providers directly and be reimbursed later by your insurance company. If you are out of the country for more than six months of the year, your U.S. domestic coverage is actually void, even for services in the U.S.

If you do have a claim overseas that is covered, you could still face many concerns including:

- Translating claim forms into English.
- Calculating exchange rates.
- Making payments in foreign currencies.
- Communicating with a U.S. based insurance company that is up to twelve time zones away.

Reasonably priced international coverage is available for short personal trips or extended business stays. That coverage typically includes an international network of PPO providers, 24-hour customer service lines, emergency evacuation coverage if adequate care is not available in the country you are visiting or residing, and protection for evacuation from war risk. If you are living abroad for an extended period and plan to return to the U.S., you also want to consider if your international plan has coverage for services in the U.S.

If you or your employees are going to be overseas for a period of more than six months, you will also want to consider the following:

- Does the international plan limit pre-existing or chronic conditions?
- Will you get credit for prior U.S. based creditable coverage?
- Will the coverage meet HIPAA and COBRA requirements?
- Will it allow you to transition back into U.S. domestic coverage without pre-existing condition limitations?

If you are planning to travel abroad for pleasure or for business, reviewing your options only takes a few minutes of your time and in the end could save you hours of headaches.

For more information, please contact your trusted advisor at Swartzbaugh-Farber – Client Centered – Client Advocates™.