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Travel Advisories - Intelligence Resources for Global P/PM
David L. Pells
Editorial

Travel Advisories – Intelligence Resources for Global Program and Project Management

David L. Pells

Introduction

Do you travel internationally on occasion, work on a program or project with employees or suppliers in more than one country, or work outside of your native country? Do you work in an organization or on a program with projects, project elements or project stakeholders in multiple countries, places that you or others in your organization must visit occasionally?

During the last ten years, I have travelled to Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, South America and around the United States. In many cases, I have visited cities and countries that I did not know so well, either recent history or current conditions. And in some cases, I found some disconcerting conditions – either economic, political or social instability, or health or climate related. I have learned that it is wise to check local conditions before arrival, to learn something about the country and city where I will be staying, and to learn the location of the nearest embassy, consulate or health clinic.

Fortunately, I have found that many government agencies provide highly useful information to their citizens who are traveling abroad. For example, the US State Department issues regular travel warnings for countries that might not be safe for US citizens. The Australian, British and other governments offer similar information and services for their citizens. In addition, there are good sources of information and intelligence on the internet related to disease outbreaks, health conditions, seasonal climate, weather events or conditions in various parts of the world.

In today's global economy, where so many people and organizations around the world are connected, many external events, conditions and factors can affect our programs and projects. As these external factors and conditions have both increased and become more complex, the need for global intelligence has also increased. Program and project risks are increasing, and especially for critical human resources on our projects – including project managers.

This month I thought it might be useful to mention some information resources that are available for identifying and mitigating some of the risks associated with international travel – and potentially affecting multinational programs and projects.

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Government Travel Advisories

International travel advisories issued by governmental agencies serve a very important purpose – to protect people who might be planning to visit a place with potentially dangerous conditions. Here are some examples of governmental agencies and services that warn citizens about visiting countries or places with political unrest, instabilities or dangers.

Australian Government's Smartraveller Advisories – The Australian Government's travel advisory and consular information service is called **Smartraveller** and can be found at http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/. [1] Their latest advisory states "*Australians are advised that on 1 May 2011 the US Government issued a Worldwide Travel Alert warning of the enhanced potential for violence given recent counter-terrorism activity in Pakistan. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has advised all Embassies and Consulates of the need for security awareness following the death of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan…*"[2]

The website's purpose is stated as "*To help Australians avoid difficulties overseas, we maintain travel advisories for more than 160 destinations overseas. Our travel advice provides accurate, up-to-date information about the risks Australians might face overseas, assisting you to make well-informed decisions about whether, when and where to travel. We recommend reading our destination-specific travel advisories for the country of your destination. If you are living or travelling overseas we also recommend that you subscribe to receive free automatic email notification each time the travel advice for your selected destination/s is updated. That way you can ensure that you have the latest information. We also recommend you register your travel and contact details, so we can contact you in an emergency…*" [3]

Also on their website, links to the following:

- Travel Advice
  by destination (countries listed alphabetically);
- We advise against travel to these destinations (with link to list of 12 countries with information about those countries);
- Reconsider your need to travel to these destinations (with link to list of another 19 countries, with country-specific information provided);
- General advice to Australians overseas;
- Advice for Australians travelling by sea;
- Travel Bulletins - the latest news and guidance on general issues of interest to the Australian traveler; and
- Much additional information related to travel and living abroad.

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This information can be highly useful to anyone, not just Australian citizens.

British Government Advisories – **The Foreign and Commonwealth Office** – 'the FCO' or 'the Foreign Office' for short – is the government department responsible for promoting British interests overseas and supporting British citizens and businesses around the globe. The FCO's website at http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/ [4] has a wealth of information for travellers and people living abroad, including latest news affecting travel in various places, travel advice for various countries, advisory articles related to many important travel topics (replacing passports, finding embassies, health and medical insurance, etc.), advice for living or doing business abroad, health and weather related information and advisories, guidance for dealing with problems, and much more.

Of particular interest is the Overseas Security Information for Business, on which webpage it states "*Political and economic developments, cyber risks, bribery and corruption …these are some of the potential issues your business could face when you begin to trade overseas or expand into fresh overseas markets. OSIB, is a free service jointly run by UK Trade & Investment and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. It provides you with authoritative, accessible and topical information on countries, and the key issues related to the political, economic and business security environments. It can help you identify these risks, understand more about them – and guard effectively against them. By helping you manage the risks of doing business overseas, and go with your eyes open, OSIB can help you succeed…safely…*" [5]   The website provides advice and information for working in 90 countries.

Canadian Government Services – **Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada** maintains a very robust website at http://www.voyage.gc.ca/index-eng.asp. [6]   Their traveling and living abroad section contains a great deal of information for those traveling, living, working or doing business around the world. Their "Travel Reports and Warnings" section states "*Travel Reports offer information on safety and security, local laws and customs, entry requirements, health conditions and other important travel issues. Countries with an asterisk (*) currently contain a Travel Warning, indicating that Canadians should either avoid non-essential travel to the country or to specific region(s) of the country, or avoid all travel to the country or to specific region(s) of the country… Travelling to a country with a Travel Warning may impact your health insurance and/or trip cancellation insurance…*" [7]

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"*Travel Reports provide Canadians with official information and advice from the Government of Canada on situations that may affect their safety and well-being abroad. Travel Reports may include a Travel Warning for a country, or region(s) of a country, where security conditions put Canadians at heightened risk. Travel Reports help Canadians make their own informed decisions in order to minimize risk while travelling abroad.*" [8]

South African Travel Advisories – the **Department of International Relations and Cooperation**, Republic of South Africa, maintains a website with "Advice for South African Citizens Traveling Abroad". [9] The site contains useful information about travel preparations, passports, visas, insurance, air & ground transport, health and security risks, and the important Registration of South Africans Abroad (ROSA) program. Of particular note is the listing of countries with risks of contracting Yellow Fever. Their advice and information related to "what you should know before working abroad" is also highly useful, especially for preparing for overseas assignments.

Registration of South Africans Abroad (ROSA) is a software program developed by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to enable travelers to register on-line. The information travelers register on ROSA allows the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to assist South African citizens in event of an emergency. The registration is a free, voluntary service provided by Government (through the Department of International Relations and Cooperation). ROSA is only available to South African citizens who are travelling, living or working abroad. ROSA is an initiative that is endorsed and supported by the Association of South African Travel Agents (ASATA). [10] More information at http://www.dfa.gov.za/consular/index.html.

US Government Travel Services – the **Bureau of Consular Affairs** in the US Department of State maintains a website with a wide range of services for US citizens traveling and living abroad at http://travel.state.gov/. [11] In addition to a good deal of information related to international travel, passports, visas and traveling with families, the website contains sections on Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts.

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Current **Travel Warnings** "*are issued when long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable lead the State Department to recommend that Americans avoid or consider the risk of travel to that country. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff. The countries listed below meet those criteria*…" The site lists 33 countries and locations considered to be dangerous, with links to webpages for each place with specific information. [12]

Current **Travel Alerts** are "*issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions, either transnational or within a particular country, that pose significant risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high-profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events are examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert*…" [13]

Currently, there are alerts on the website related to Bahrain, Egypt, Japan, Tunisia and Worldwide. The worldwide alert states, as of May 1, 2011: "*The U.S. Department of State alerts U.S. citizens traveling and residing abroad to the enhanced potential for anti-American violence given recent counter-terrorism activity in Pakistan. Given the uncertainty and volatility of the current situation, U.S. citizens in areas where recent events could cause anti-American violence are strongly urged to limit their travel outside of their homes and hotels and avoid mass gatherings and demonstrations. U.S. citizens should stay current with media coverage of local events and be aware of their surroundings at all times. This Travel Alert expires August 1, 2011*…" [14]

The US State Department also offers their Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), a free service to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows individuals to enter information about an upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can provide assistance in an emergency. It also allows Americans residing abroad to get routine information from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. [15]

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Any program or project manager who is preparing for international travel should review the State Department's travel website at http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html. You certainly want to know if the country or location that you plan to visit is the subject of a current travel warning or travel alert. There are also many other websites and resources online with travel alerts and information, especially related to specific destinations.

International Health Advisories

Another general subject that international travelers should think about and plan for is related to diseases, health and medical services. It may be necessary to obtain a medical exam, updated immunizations or shots, medications, medical insurance, permits or other information or support prior to, during or immediately after a trip. Here are some useful online resources.

Center for Disease Control – the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia, USA maintains a website specifically related to health and medical treatment for travelers. [16] Its "Destinations" section contains a great interactive map that links to health alerts, disease outbreak news, local emergency treatment centers, security information, and general health and medical information for 200 countries around the world. [17] The CDC's section on Vaccinations is very thorough [18], and their Diseases section describes risks, precautions, symptoms, treatment and more for dozens of diseases, ranging from African Sleeping Sickness and AIDS through Malaria, Smallpox, Yellow Fever, and many others. [19] The CDC site also includes alerts related to emergency situations such as the aftermath of the recent Earthquake in Japan, recent Polio outbreak in Russia and former Soviet countries, and Dengue Fever outbreaks in the tropics.

World Health Organization - The World Health Organization (WHO) is the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations' system. WHO experts produce health guidelines and standards, and help countries address public health issues. WHO also supports and promotes health research. Through WHO, governments can jointly tackle global health problems and improve people's well-being. 193 countries and two associate members are WHO's

World Health Organization

membership. They meet every year at the World Health Assembly in Geneva to set

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policy for the Organization, approve the Organization's budget, and every five years, to appoint the Director-General. Their work is supported by the 34-member Executive Board, which is elected by the Health Assembly. Six regional committees focus on health matters of a regional nature. WHO and its Member States work with many partners, including UN agencies, donors, nongovernmental organizations, WHO collaborating centres and the private sector. [20]

The WHO website [21] contains two great sections on Disease Outbreak News and Emergencies and Disasters. In the Disaster Outbreaks section, recent disease outbreaks around the world are reported (currently outbreaks in Germany, Uganda, Indonesia, and Côte d'Ivoire. Archives contain historic information for diseases outbreaks by (a) year; (b) disease; and (c) country. [22] The WHO section on Emergencies and Disasters is titled "Health Action in Crisis" (HAC) and contains guidelines and helpful information related to disease prevention and treatment during emergencies, information about current health crises in Somalia and Libya, and useful contact information. [23]

Public Health Agency of Canada – The Public Health Agency of Canada provides and maintains excellent information related to travel health notices, currently including news on recent polio, dengue fever, malaria and measles outbreaks around the world; disease and health information on ten frequent destinations by Canadians (China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, France, India, Kenya, Mexico, Poland, Thailand, UK); fact sheets about the most common and serious travel-related diseases; immunizations and vaccinations; Yellow Fever vaccination centres across Canada; food safety information for travelers; injury prevention guidelines; helpful information for those who become ill during or after travel; and other useful information. [24]

TravelHealth.co.uk – This website contains useful information on travel health, diseases, destinations, advisories, resources and other information. [25]

The **UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office** website (described above) also provides information abut diseases, health and related matters for travelers. [4]

Smartraveler.gov.au – this Australian government website (also described above) contains a great section on travel health – "tavelling well" – with all kinds of useful advice on a wide range of health and medical issues for travelers, including disease prevention, staying healthy while traveling, medical treatment and insurance.. [26]

Finally, many local health clinics, hospitals, and medical treatment centers offer travel services including checkups, vaccinations, disease and health advisories, medication information and prescriptions, and other services. Good examples are Medi-Travel International in Cape Town, South Africa [27] and Group Health in Seattle [28]. There are many others around the world.

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Climate & Weather Advisories

The final subject that I want to briefly discuss in this paper is related to sources of climate and weather related information that international travelers should think about before traveling. While Americans traveling abroad may think more about political unrest and health issues, those visiting the United States may need to be concerned about the weather across North America.

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA) – this U.S. government agency [29] provides alerts, news and information related to climate, weather events, oceans and waterways, and other related information. NOAA also maintains a climate service website where weather around North America, the Caribbean and elsewhere is monitored. That website - http://www.climate.gov/ – includes information on the Atlantic and Pacific Hurricane Seasons, with predictions of tropical storms in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and Caribbean Sea. [30]

Hurricanes Karl, Igor and Julia (from left to right on September 16, 2010) among the Atlantic storms last hurricane season – image courtesy of NOAA

According to NOAA's latest report, "*the Atlantic basin is expected to see an above-normal hurricane season this year, according to the seasonal outlook issued by NOAA's Climate Prediction Center – a division of the National Weather Service. Across the entire Atlantic Basin for the six-month season, which begins June 1, NOAA is predicting the following ranges this year:12 to 18 named storms (winds of 39 mph or higher), of which: 6 to 10 could become hurricanes (winds of 74 mph or higher), including: 3 to 6 major hurricanes (Category 3, 4 or 5; winds of 111 mph or higher). Each of these ranges has a 70 percent likelihood, and indicate that activity will exceed the seasonal average of 11 named storms, six hurricanes and two major hurricanes.*" [31]

World Meteorological Organization (WMO) - A specialized agency of the United Nations, the WMO is the UN system's voice on the state and behaviour of the Earth's

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atmosphere, its interaction with the oceans, the climate it produces and the resulting distribution of water resources. WMO has a membership of 189 Member States and Territories. It originated from the International Meteorological Organization (IMO), which was founded in 1873. Established in 1950, WMO became the specialized agency of the United Nations in 1951 for meteorology (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences. As weather, climate and the water cycle know no national boundaries, international cooperation at a global scale is essential for the development of meteorology and operational hydrology as well as to reap the benefits from their application. WMO provides the framework for such international cooperation. [32]

The WMO website contains a wide range of useful climate and weather related information, including weather forecasts and warnings worldwide, links to national meteorological and hydro-meteorological service websites, disaster risk reduction information, results of the latest World Meteorological Congress in Geneva, and various products, links to other sources of information, and more.

_____

Because climate and weather are widely reported and tracked by commercial news, media and information organizations, not just by governments, I thought it useful to just provide some sources for weather in different parts of the world. So here are some useful websites where climate and weather in Africa, Asia Pacific, Central America and Caribbean Region, Europe, Indian Subcontinent, Middle East & North Africa, Russia, South America and the UK can be found and monitored; most of these services include both current weather and forecasts.

Weather in Africa

- http://www.lonelyplanet.com/africa/weather
- http://www.weather.com/maps/geography/africaandmiddleeast/africasatellite_large.html
- http://weather.yahoo.com/regional/africa/
- http://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g293740-s208/South-Africa:Weather.And.When.To.Go.html
- http://worldweather.wmo.int/africa.htm

Weather in Asia Pacific Region

- http://www.apcac.org/?id=51
- http://www.gate1travel.com/weather/asia-pacific/
- http://weather.yahoo.com/img/asia_sat_440_mdy_y.html
- http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel/weather/region-east_asia.php
- http://www.allmetsat.com/en/index.html

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Weather in Central America and Caribbean Region

- http://www.travelnotes.org/Weather/caribbean.htm
- http://www.weather.com/maps/maptype/satelliteworld/caribbeansatellite_large.html
- http://www.wunderground.com/global/Region/CA/Temperature.html
- http://weather.weatherbug.com/Central-America-and-the-Caribbean-weather.html
- http://www.tropicalweather.net/weather_averages.html

Weather in Europe

- http://www.weatheronline.co.uk/Europe.htm
- http://weather.yahoo.com/regional/europe/
- http://www.weather.com/maps/geography/europe/index_large.html
- http://worldweather.wmo.int/europe.htm
- http://weather.org/europe.htm

Weather on Indian Subcontinent

- http://www.weather.com/common/drilldown/IN.html
- http://www.wunderground.com/global/IN.html
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_of_India
- http://www.weather.com/maps/maptype/satelliteworld/indiasatellite_large.html
- http://weather.yahoo.com/india/

Weather in Middle East & North Africa

- http://www.home-weather.com/north-africa/
- http://weather.org/middle_east.htm
- http://www.weather.com/maps/geography/africaandmiddleeast/middleeastsatellite_large.html
- http://www.parstimes.com/weather/mideast/
- http://www.weatherzone.com.au/world/middle-east

Weather in Russia

- http://www.russia-weather.com/
- http://www.wunderground.com/global/RS.html
- http://www.wunderground.com/global/stations/27612.html
- http://www.weather.com/common/drilldown/RS.html
- http://www.weatherreports.com/Russia/Moscow

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Weather in South America

- http://www.weather.com/maps/geography/southamerica/index_large.html
- http://www.weatheronline.co.uk/SouthAmerica.htm
- http://worldweather.wmo.int/s_america.htm
- http://www.rssweather.com/dir/South%20America
- http://www.weatherzone.com.au/world/south-america

Weather in UK and Ireland

- http://www.accuweather.com/ukie/index.asp
- http://uk.weather.yahoo.com/
- http://www.weatheronline.co.uk/
- http://worldweather.wmo.int/010/m010.htm
- http://www.netweather.tv/index.cgi?action=ukw;sess=

Relationship to Program & Project Management

So what does this all have to do with managing programs and projects? If you, or anyone on your team or in your organization, must travel internationally, then the success of that travel and perhaps even personal safely could be affected by political or social unrest, disease outbreaks and health-related factors, or severe weather. Those same factors might affect or disrupt your employees, offices, suppliers, customers or elements of a project located anywhere in the world.

These external risks seem to be increasing. The resources mentioned above can be helpful for identifying, planning for, and mitigating some or all of those risks. I hope that is the case.

Final comment: In this paper I have focused on English-language resources only. I am sure that there are equally useful online resources in Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and other languages, developed by governments and commercial organizations. The main point, regardless of your native language, is that one should review online information resources, learn and prepare well prior to your international travel, and heed the advice provided. In all cases, that advice will be based on much research and experience.

Good luck with your projects!

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5. http://www.ukti.gov.uk/export/howwehelp/osibupdatesinfo.html
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9. http://www.dirco.gov.za/consular/travel_advice.htm#pas
10. http://www.southafrica.org.tw/SA-REG.HTM
11. http://travel.state.gov/
12. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html
13. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html
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15. https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/
16. http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/
17. http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list.htm
18. http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/vaccinations.htm
19. http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/diseases.htm
20. http://www.who.int/about/brochure_en.pdf
21. http://www.who.int/en/
22. http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/index.html
23. http://www.who.int/hac/en/index.html
24. http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php
25. http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/links/advisories.htm
26. http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/travelwell.html
27. http://www.meditravel.co.za/
28. http://www.ghc.org/provider/travelservice.jhtml
29. http://www.noaa.gov/
30. http://www.climate.gov/
31. http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2011/20110519_atlantichurricaneoutlook.html
32. http://www.wmo.int/pages/index_en.html

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About the Author

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David L. Pells is Managing Editor of the ***PM World Journal***, a global eJournal for program and project management, and Executive Director of the PM World Library. He is also the president and CEO of PM World, the virtual organization behind the journal and library, and of PM World Services, an executive P/PM advisory firm. David is an internationally recognized leader in the field of professional project management with more than 35 years of experience on a wide variety of programs and projects, including engineering, construction, defense, energy, transit, high technology, and nuclear security, and project sizes ranging from several thousand to ten billion dollars. He has been an active professional leader in the United States since the 1980s, serving on the board of directors of the Project Management Institute (PMI®) twice. David was awarded PMI's Person of the Year award in 1998 and Fellow Award in 1999. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK; Project Management Associates (PMA - India); and of the Russian Project Management Association SOVNET. From June 2006 until March 2012, he was the managing editor of the globally acclaimed *PM World Today* eJournal. He is currently an advisor to several government organizations related to P/PM on global programs. David has published widely, speaks at conferences and events worldwide, and can be contacted at editor@pmworldjournal.net.