

Emergencies are a reality

Anyone who takes a telephone call in the middle of the night is rarely expecting to hear good news...

For an airline employee, that call might even concern a serious aircraft incident or accident. If so, as Robert Jensen, president and chief executive officer of global disaster management company Kenyon International Emergency Services, says: "Your life will never be the same again!"

This sobering observation certainly captured the attention of all the participants at the start of the recent inaugural ERA Crisis Planning Seminar, generously hosted and sponsored by Kenyon.

were well prepared with sufficient plans and trained staff.

Unfortunately, a lack of preparation was then revealed by a poor response to the incident/accident.

Building on the success of his presentation at era2006 in Barcelona, Jensen had agreed to run a number of seminars at Kenyon's UK headquarters near Heathrow Airport, aimed at senior ERA member airline and airport executives. The intention of these sessions is to consider specific case studies of aircraft disasters, particularly in terms of public expectations following such incidents.

The first Crisis Planning Seminar was held on 13 February this year and involved a number of structured sessions to provoke both CEOs and personnel with the responsibility for 'managing' incident/accident events to revisit their existing procedures. The seminar sought to motivate delegates to continually train and plan for the worst case scenario. Ultimately, after all, airline responses will be judged by the survivors, relatives, staff, general public and, of course, the media.

As Jensen reminded delegates, you only have one chance to get everything right first time.

Kenyon has committed to run further seminars to highlight the importance of disaster management planning; there is a serious misconception within some sectors of the industry that you do not need to plan or contract such expertise and that assistance is available 'on call' – unfortunately the reality is somewhat different.

The intention of the seminars is to raise awareness of crisis planning amongst ERA members and seek to find cost-effective solutions by way of exclusive discounted packages from Kenyon. These packages can encompass some or all of the following: disaster management, disaster human services, call centres, crisis communications and consultants to advise on appropriate response requirements for an incident.

The ultimate responsibility for crisis management will always rest with the airline. No two incidents will ever be exactly the same. However, best practice lessons have been learnt and expert training is available to be undertaken to mitigate the effects of an incident; unfortunately the only constant is the existence of victims and their families.

For details of future Kenyon/ERA seminars, or Kenyon/ERA exclusive membership discounted plans, please contact nick.mower@eraa.org ■



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Delegates at the ERA/Kenyon Crisis Planning Seminar were reminded of the painful truth that you only have one opportunity to respond to an accident or incident.

No airline intends to have a major incident or accident. However, an airline that does suffer an incident/accident and does not have a crisis management plan risks a double disaster – the accident itself and, potentially, a failure to handle the response appropriately.

There have been numerous examples of poor disaster management leading to the subsequent failure of the airline and/or the removal of the accountable executives. In most of these cases, the companies' senior management had considered, without checking, that they

The success that airlines, manufacturers, suppliers and airports have had in dramatically reducing accident rates during the past 50 years is a tribute to the industry's diligence and integrity in pursuing and investing in better technology and procedures. The result, however, is that (thankfully) very few executives have had experience in managing disasters. Whilst most companies regularly train their senior personnel in crisis management, this training often fails to cover the full breadth of managing a disaster and can often put too much emphasis on media management aspects.