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Traveling Overseas? Learn Road Rules, First

Road Accidents Leading Threat during Travel Abroad

Salem, N.H. – April 25, 2007 – Americans of all ages are planning trips to more adventurous, exotic and challenging destinations across the globe. But whether you rely on public transportation, or rent a car while overseas, what happens if you or your family becomes involved in an automobile accident far away from home? According to the U.S. Department of State, the largest cause of non-natural deaths among U.S. citizens overseas is road accidents.

Dr. Etienne Krug, director of the department of injuries and violence prevention at the World Health Organization was recently quoted in a New York Times article (*"The Biggest Little-Noticed Hazard,"* 4/17/07) as saying, that "each year 1.2 million people die in road accidents and 20 to 50 million are injured and survive, often with disabilities the rest of their lives."

The Association for Safe International Road Travel (www.asirt.org) provides a glimpse of some of the dangers of driving abroad. Of the top 15 tourist destinations, China, the Russian Federation, Mexico and Poland are the most dangerous. China has a fatality rate of 26.2 deaths per 10,000 vehicles on the roads. According to an April 23, 2007, report on *NBC's* "Today," China is adding 2,000 vehicles per day on its city streets and averaging between 300 to 600 traffic-related deaths per day.

ASIRT also provides insights into what travelers abroad should expect from drivers in various parts of the world. For example, ASIRT notes that drivers in Kenya lack adequate driver training, and often drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs, speed and are unpredictable. In Morocco, drivers are known for ignoring road markings and driving recklessly. Drivers in Vietnam often drive on the wrong side of the road and fail to yield to oncoming traffic. Drivers in Greece often drive on sidewalks and fail to signal when making turns. In Italy, drivers often ignore red lights and pass recklessly on narrow roads. Drivers in Argentina ignore speed limits while drivers in Brazil often don't have valid drivers' licenses and drive under the influence. In Mexico, drivers violate traffic laws and speed on roads that are often in poor condition.

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On Call, Road Accidents /2

According to Dr. Robert Wheeler, medical director for On Call International, a global medical and travel assistance company providing services and products for business and leisure travelers, "There's hardly a place on earth where you're not going to find lousy drivers." Wheeler explains, "The keys are learning the local road cultures and traffic patterns in advance, checking your vehicles to know they are safe and meet the basic safety standards, and paying attention to other drivers on the road."

Dr. Wheeler adds, "Being prepared for an unexpected accident or illness is the best advice for anyone going overseas. When you realize that the most frequent cause of death overseas is automobile accidents, why take unnecessary risks?"

Dr. Wheeler offers the following tips for reducing medical risks when planning a trip to one of the more adventurous parts of the world:

- Carry a cell phone with key emergency contacts; but, avoid using while driving
- Be prepared for jet lag when traveling across three or more time zones, and don't drive when tired
- Avoid night road travel, especially in mountainous regions
- Avoid overcrowded, over-weight or top-heavy buses, minivans and taxis; Ride only in taxis with functional seat belts in the back seats; Don't hitchhike
- Avoid riding on motorcycles, scooters or mopeds, but if you do, make certain to wear a regulation helmet
- Be alert for reckless driving and insist that your driver drive responsibly; Be prepared to disembark at your first safe opportunity
- Avoid driving with anyone who might appear to be under the influence of alcohol, medications or appear to be over-tired, irrational or distracted
- Wear reflective clothing when walking at night and bright clothing when walking during the day; Be aware of traffic patterns, which often differ from the U.S
- If renting a vehicle, make certain the car or van meets basic safety standards; Check tires, headlights, windshield wipers, brakes and headlights
- Get information in advance about local highway hazards, customs and driving conditions
- Know the laws and penalties for alcohol and/or drug-related offenses, such as drunk driving, and act accordingly
- Make certain what side of the road you should be driving on and consider putting a visual reminder in the car
- Consider renting a GPS navigation system
- Consider purchasing a medical, personal and travel assistance membership that will provide you with 24-hour emergency services including worldwide legal assistance, emergency message transmission to your family and an emergency medical evacuation benefit to cover you for the duration of your trip.

On Call International is a leading provider of customized medical, security and travel assistance for international business and leisure travelers as well as expatriates, students and others away from home. Operating 24/7/365, On Call International specializes in emergency evacuations from any point on the globe, assisting more than seven million travelers. The U.S.-owned and trained assistance company serves the travel, insurance and maritime industries. On Call is a member and the U.S. representative of the 26-partner International Assistance Group, a global network of independent assistance companies. For more information, visit www.oncallinternational.com.