Emergency Response Program: A Holistic Approach

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In light of recent corporate aviation accidents and significant world events, I have seen many business aviation operators look solely to an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) as a holistic solution to their needs. ERPs, while a significant component of a robust and effective Emergency Response Program (Program), are not sufficient to address a multitude of events that may impact an operation. History has shown when an ERP is the sole component of a Program, the operators' ability to proactively and effectively manage a response is significantly diminished. A robust, objective driven Program, which incorporates their ERP, allows operators to successfully execute an emergency response.

The foundation of a comprehensive Emergency Response Program is knowledge of best practices and regulatory requirements combined with company culture. Incorrect or outdated information typically results in a false sense of preparedness and poorly-scoped response procedures. As such, it is critical that operators develop a basic understanding of emergency response. Often times there is a significant discrepancy between what operators expect in a response and what actually occurs. Proper education will help companies to develop a realistic and practical approach to emergencies. Industry best practices along with regulatory requirements represent core competencies within emergency response and help foster an environment that encourages real growth and development.

Once operators have developed a strong knowledge base, they should engage in a Tabletop to ensure critical departments understand the mechanics of task execution and efficient sharing of information. A Tabletop will help to illuminate the common pressures and stresses that a company faces after a serious event has occurred. This helps illustrate the quantity of data that must be gathered and disseminated in the event of an actual emergency. Having simulated an entire response, it is easier to identify weaknesses that were previously unrecognizable. There are often serious discussions on topics that are nebulous or divisive. Such discussions will result in new internal procedures and protocols that add to the evolution of the existing ERP.

Once the ERP has been appropriately developed, conducting an exercise is a useful tool in ensuring that the operation's response resources have a clear understanding of the process and

it holds up to rigorous testing. The inclusion of direct response organizations that would be utilized in the event of an emergency, such as the NTSB, will greatly increase the effectiveness of the exercise and ensure the ERP holds up to all expectations.

The most effective companies are continually evolving a holistic Program including recurrent training (classroom, experiential, digital,) and a multitude of realistic scenarios ranging from terrorism to medical emergencies. Hazards are constantly evolving and companies have to move in order to anticipate these risks and adapt accordingly. Executing a response based on principles derived from outdated data could genuinely endanger a company's brand. Responsible companies will foster a culture that promotes and encourages an iterative approach to emergency response.

The most prepared operators have actively begun the process of implementing an Emergency Response Program, which contains all of the elements discussed above. Working with these high performing teams and building upon their strong base of knowledge has allowed me to delve into some of the more intricate aspects of emergency response. Top tier flight departments recognize how important it is to ask for help in areas where they are not experts. Most companies do not have expertise in mortuary affairs, personal effects, family assistance, and the NTSB investigative process. As a result, it is important for organizations to utilize outside response professionals to augment their existing team. Organizations that are proactive and implement a holistic Emergency Response Program, in addition to a strong Emergency Response Plan, are best positioned to take care of what matters most—their people and their brand.

Fireside Partners Inc.
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