

For: LeClairRyan, Alexandria, Va.
From: Parness & Associates, Aberdeen, N.J.

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CORPORATE AVIATION SECTOR COULD BENEFIT BY RAMPING UP ACCIDENT PREPAREDNESS, SAY LECLAIRRYAN ATTORNEYS

--Companies should run emergency preparedness drills and training sessions involving senior management as well as HR and public affairs departments, attorneys advise during webinar.

ALEXANDRIA, VA. (7/26/18) – Corporate flight departments often need to be more proactive about planning for accidents given the high stakes involved, cautioned two LeClairRyan attorneys during a webinar attended by more than 200 senior executives and other professionals from the aviation sector.

“The profound effects of an accident always extend well beyond the events themselves,” Mark A. Dombroff, an Alexandria-based member of the national law firm and co-leader of its Aviation Industry practice, told the audience. “And yet in working with corporate flight departments around the country, our experience has been that many have a long way to go when it comes to emergency response preparation.”

Corporate aviation departments should emulate commercial airlines, which frequently engage in practice run-throughs and tabletop exercises involving senior management as well as departments such as HR and public affairs, he said. “I cannot tell you the number of corporate aviation departments we have seen that essentially treat the emergency response plan as just another book on the shelf—they pull it down once a year, check the box and put it back,” Dombroff said. “Having a plan on paper is simply not enough.”

During the July 17 webinar, Dombroff and veteran transportation attorney Christa Hinckley, a partner in LeClairRyan’s Houston office, offered vital information for companies seeking to ramp up emergency preparedness. They discussed how to handle HR issues during worst-case scenarios; described how accident investigations play out both domestically and internationally; offered tips on dealing with the media and protecting the brand; and explained how brokers and insurers can help companies post-accident, among other topics.

A critical part of the process, Hinckley noted, is establishing an efficient organizational chart. “You need a centralized command center where all of the information gets funneled in and out, but you also need a backup protocol for that as well,” the attorney said. “Equally important is your chain of command: You’ve got to have somebody who is ultimately going to make the decision and answer to parties such as the CEO or shareholders.”

Meanwhile, the internal response team needs to know all applicable rules and regulations and understand where to go, what to do and—critically in the age of social media—what to say. “You need a clear communication protocol,” Hinckley said. “Establishing clear lines of communication is probably the most difficult thing to achieve in a crisis. It takes a lot of careful planning.”

Hinckley and Dombroff structured the webinar in line with the six stages of crisis management, as outlined in a 1995 *Harvard Business Review* article. They involve avoiding crises; preparing to manage those that arise, and taking steps to recognize, contain, resolve and learn from such events. In addition to accidents, difficult scenarios in aviation could involve severe weather, computer system failures, food poisoning, disease outbreaks, terrorist attacks or even allegations of impropriety, the attorneys noted.

Companies should pay particularly close attention to the emotional and psychological toll of such events on those involved, Hinckley said. “I really do encourage everyone to take care of their employees if they have been involved in any kind of accident or crisis response,” she said. “You need to do all you can to help them cope with the trauma they have experienced.”

To hear the full recording, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/yavp4wpk>

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As a trusted advisor, LeClairRyan provides business counsel and client representation in corporate law and litigation. In this role, the firm applies its knowledge, insight and skill to help clients achieve their business objectives while managing and minimizing their legal risks, difficulties and expenses. With offices from coast to coast, the firm represents a wide variety of clients nationwide. For more information about LeClairRyan, visit www.leclairryan.com.

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