

Module 1: Communication plan, kit and equipment including PPE (personal protective equipment)

[00:00:12] Welcome back. Hopefully, since the last video on risk assessments, you've had time to take part in a discussion forum, have a look at some of those optional resources that we've shared with you and also take part in the quiz. At the end of the last session, we talked about the contact side of your risk assessment and having a good communication plan. So to start off this session, we're going to look at that in a little bit more detail and why it matters in relation to your risk assessment.

[00:00:49] As you can see, there are two types of people that you will put onto your risk assessment, as well as all the contact information and phone numbers of everybody that you're working with and will be in contact with for the duration of your assignment. As well as this, you need the phone numbers for any primary health care hospital or any kind of emergency facilities that you'll need in the place where you're going. Also, be aware to know what the number for the emergency services is in the location that you're going, because it will differ if you work in different regions or indeed different countries.

[00:01:26] So make sure those are allocated into your risk assessment under the contact information side. What I really want to talk about here is who is to be communicated in the event of an emergency happening and who is your best person for this? If you work for a newsroom, your editor will be one of your point-of-contacts. They will be the person that should know about your daily whereabouts and also not only updating them on the content, but also updating them on your safety concerns as you go through your assignment.

[00:02:03] In some larger newsrooms, you will have a security manager who will also be accountable for your safety and also be holding your risk assessment and checking in with you on a regular basis. And this brings me nicely into the check-in process. As I said before, having a risk assessment is great, but if we don't have anybody to check in with, then no one will know if anything's happened and therefore that delays us getting any support if needed when we do get into a situation. So before you leave, make sure you've got a check-in process in place.

[00:02:38] Now, you don't need to check-in every five minutes. We change the regularity of a check-in depending on the nature of where we're going. I would say your first check-in is going to be when you leave your home situation to wherever you're traveling to. When you reach that destination, you check-in to say that you've arrived. What you need to do is think about a check-in process as being every time you leave a location and move to another location and it changes depending on the risk. So if, you know that you're going to travel down a very difficult road, that potentially there might be checkpoints on there or militia or there's a threat on that road, then you might check-in with somebody every 10 minutes.

[00:03:20] And this is where the difference comes into place, because what we can do is we check-in too much, then people forget to take it seriously. But if we make sure that it actually relates to the threat that we might be experiencing, then hopefully people will be more aware of it. If it becomes more regular, then they're going to be more alert because unfortunately, we can normalize risk and become a little bit risk-resistant. So we need to be careful about planning when and how we're going to check-in. A check-in can look like a phone call, it could be an email or it could be a text message.

[00:03:56] I would suggest text messages and make sure they're short and easy to send, and also that you have, potentially in areas where you're unsure about road signs or names of places that you're going, to maybe develop a spot code system so that you can put spots on the map areas that you're going and give them a name, perhaps even a nickname. Just make sure the person you're checking in with understands what they are and can actually relate that to being where you are on the map.

[00:04:26] So having a check-in process is really just about your peace of mind so that someone knows where you are and also for the person who has commissioned your peace of mind to know that you're also where you need to be. And that any changes in that can be reacted to as and when. Again, this is all about safety and also time, and time is one of the biggest enemies when we get into a difficult situation because we have very little time to make very quick decisions. And often if you don't have someone's phone number stored in your phone, if you can't remember someone's phone number, that adds extra time into that kind of particular situation.

[00:05:02] So our communication plan is really a simple way of making sure you've got everybody's phone numbers in one place, in a safe place, and perhaps even printed out and put into your ID wallet with your press card and any other idea that you might need for that assignment. And that brings us on to thinking about what kind of things we're going to take on assignment with this. So, there's different types of communication that we can carry with us, and they all have a different role depending on the work we're doing, the first one, which is going to be the most obvious one, is our mobile phone.

[00:05:36] Now, our mobile phones now are very smart. They have a lot of capacity. They can do our emails, all our social media. And of course, they also pose a threat to us. Unfortunately, phones can be hacked, tracking apps are all now tied into our social media accounts, also our mapping systems. And also, most of the content on our phone now has a location set up so that people can see where we are at any time if they want to get into our private material. So my first tip to you, really, when using a smartphone is to designate where which apps you want to track your data with, as in your location, so you can turn these off depending on what app it is.

[00:06:22] With maps, you can download offline maps so that you don't have to use Google Maps or anything that's actually active at the time when you loading up to it. We've got another MOOC of online harassment that you can access as well, which I will share in the resources, that gives you a really good comprehensive sessions on how to stay safe online whilst working as a journalist. Threats to journalists on the digital side have escalated significantly over the years with the changes in technology. And it's best to be prepared on how to use your phone effectively and as a safety measure before you do head out.

[00:07:02] So much of our personal information is on our phone these days that anyone could access that and use it against us and exploit us. Doxxing, which is taking people's personal information and targeting their home addresses, has become particularly prevalent in the United States. So therefore, the amount of information on our mobile phone can be cleaned down or sanitized, as I call it, to make sure that you have the least amount of private and personal information within your phone when you're going to perhaps meet someone for a sensitive interview or potentially if you're go into an area where people might surveil you or detain you for being a journalist.

[00:07:39] It's good to not give too many things away by what we carry on our phone. Another way to kind of compromise on this is to have what I call a burner phone or a spare phone. This would be a very simple phone, very cheap to buy with a long life battery. These are quite good because you can have them in an emergency, and they're unlikely to break like ours mobile phones. And we do know that once we break our phone, our limit of communication drops dramatically and could put us in a lot of risk.

[00:08:09] So having a spare phone as well as a spare battery and a means to charge it is one of your first key safety tools to have with you when you're on the ground. The other thing we can look at as if working in more remote areas with limited data, which is unusual now, however, if you're covering a natural disaster somewhere where the communications have been destroyed in a flood or hurricane, then a satellite phone can be very helpful. Satellite phones are expensive, but you can hire them and you do have to sign up for a subscription to use them.

[00:08:44] Some newsrooms will have SAT phones and they will supply you with them for your work. However, we would say be careful, depending on where you're traveling, as to what the requirements are for satellite phones. In certain countries like Egypt, it is illegal for a journalist to have a satellite phone, as it is for anyone to carry any kind of other communication device with them. So check on the rules for each place that you're going to before you do something like that with you. The third thing here is just radios, normal two-way radios.

[00:09:17] It's always useful to have a couple of these, especially if you're traveling by vehicle in more remote areas so you can keep in touch with each other in case someone breaks down or perhaps you move out of communications signals. So therefore, you need some way of getting in touch with each other. You can use them in civil unrest situations, but be really careful that you don't start to look like a member of the security forces or the police by using them. But if they do block the mobile networks, which they often do, at least you've got some form of contacting somebody.

[00:09:47] So it'd be helpful to leave this with your colleague who might be there with you or perhaps even your driver so they can get in touch with you if you need to get out or vice versa. And the final thing is a BGAN. And a BGAN is literally taking a small satellite out with you -- looks a little bit like a laptop -- and being able to transmit data, whether it's video footage, emails, images back to your news desk. Again, these are very helpful if working in more remote areas where communication is difficult. So particularly in conflict zones and also where there's been an actual disaster.

[00:10:23] So the final thing we want to talk about in this particular conversation is about kitting equipment and particularly personal protective equipment. There are many considerations for what we need to take with us when we're traveling, but one of them is also about weight. And of course, if we're traveling in a small vehicle and we're going for quite some time to a very difficult environment, we want to keep the kit down to a minimum. So therefore, having a good packing list is helpful for this. So we take the absolute essentials with us and we don't over pack. And again, if you a videographer, a photographer, you already kinda carrying quite a lot of equipment anyway, so you want to keep some of your personal items down to a bit of a minimum.

[00:11:08] We've attached in this module a packing list that might help you to check-off before you actually do plan a trip. But I'd like to go through a few of these because there are extra measures for journalists that perhaps someone traveling on a normal a normal

trip might not consider. So let's have a look at some of these. The first thing is our actual personal information that we need to take with us, and we need some documents to travel for our work. So we need to make sure we've applied for our visas in time, copies of our I.D. and also to gain some sort of insurance policy to protect us.

[00:11:45] Now, I know this is challenging to pay based on where you are in the world. Not all people offer insurance for journalists, but at least try and get some basic medical cover for your story. I'm speaking here particularly to freelancers, I know many newsrooms have insurance policies for their journalists. And even if you do have one, make sure you check it and know what you can actually access through it and carry a copy of it as well as the phone number so you know how to get that insurance in place if you do need it.

[00:12:15] The other thing we might need to carry with us are letters of permission, sometimes these go a long way, especially going through checkpoints and traveling through different regions or states. So we have some kind of formal permission or a letterhead so that can help us in certain situations. Also, make sure you carry a press ID. It's not always wise to have it visible in some areas where there's been increased attacks on the press. It's not wise to have a press card out, but it's certainly good to have it somewhere near us so we know exactly where it is.

[00:12:44] We advise all journalists to take a grab bag that has all those items in it, as always, in your personal space. Therefore, if your main bag get stolen, at least you've got the bare essentials so they can get you out and also have your contact information, your phone in there, and also a basic first aid kit. Of course, we're not expecting everybody to be trauma medics to do this work, but it is helpful to have a basic first aid kit with you and to make sure that actually relates to where you're going. Most people get sick when they travel. So make sure you've got the bare essentials there to help you with that. We'll talk about this and travel safety in the next module.

[00:13:21] As well as the basic essentials that we've covered in our resource, we also want to talk about some of the more safety specific things. And these are door alarms to put inside hotel rooms, which will activate if someone tries to force the door in. A key essential, unfortunately, for working remotely and on your own, especially as a woman journalist. So I want to talk a little bit here about the go bag or grab bag, and this is the bag that's going to have. These essential items that relate to your personal safety whilst covering any situation.

[00:13:58] So this bag has to relate to the type of story that you're covering, whether it's an earthquake, a hurricane, civil unrest, even a coup, all of those factors will come into the types of things that you'll carry in your bag. So when you are thinking about what items to take with you, there's a checklist that you can have for each of those assignments that you can build up depending on the threats that you've already managed to identify whilst you've been doing your risk assessment.

[00:14:33] Now, as well as our essential items that we need, our mobile phone, emergency contact information, medical kit, any prescribed medicines that we need that we can't access in the location that we're going, we need to make sure we have some funds, whether it's a prepaid/preloaded credit card with money on it, some actual cash itself in a currency that you need to use where you are, as well as our visa, our insurance information. And, in addition to that, a small first aid kit and sanitary towels or tampons, anything that you use, take that with you just in case it's not available.

[00:15:14] Also, some Ziploc bags and also any kind of things you need for hygiene, whether it's antibacterial gel, wet wipes and, of course, your mask that you might need to protect you from COVID and also protect others. Again, we're going to talk about masks and face masks in a little while, but again, this is an additional item to our bag that we may not have had previously. So make sure you have that packed away as well. Now we've got a go bag ready and all the rest of the equipment we need for our assignment, we need to think about any additional protection we need, depending on the nature of the threats we might encounter whilst we're reporting.

[00:16:04] This is known as PPE or personal protective equipment, and this is designed to help us remain physically safe whilst reporting on various stories. We escalate the type of equipment we need in relation to the threat, and there is a reason for this, if we were to walk into a normal peaceful protest wearing full body armor, ballistic plates, then we would no doubt attract more attention to us than we would want. So therefore, equipment is something that we escalate depending on the nature of what's happening around us. Also, wearing large amounts of equipment is quite exhausting and could also reduce the amount of time that we can spend on a story depending on the environment, heat, the weather, things like this.

[00:17:01] So our PPE is very much tailored to what we're actually going to encounter. The first thing we need to think about, really, is protection for our head. Now, you can carry different types of helmets for this. We can carry a basic cycling helmet. If we're going into perhaps a demonstration where things are being thrown. It might be useful to wear this if we're covering a natural disaster and there's a risk of debris.

[00:17:35] The range of helmets available to you is quite varied, and they range from anything from a basic climbing helmet or cycling helmet up to a ballistic helmet, where there's potential threats from gunfire and also from larger debris, perhaps following an air strike or working in areas where there's a large amount of rubble or traveling in armored vehicles. Have a look at our guide and it'll give you some top tips on the choice of helmets and where to wear them. As well as this, we might need to think about eye protection.

[00:18:11] Now, your eye protection can range from safety glasses to cycling glasses, or you may be able to get access to ballistic glasses. Whichever one you need to choose, whichever risk you cover in, make sure they actually fit under the helmet. Also, for photographers and videographers, make sure your field of view is reasonably unobstructed and that actually they don't fog up as soon as you put them on. Otherwise that's going to limit your field of view. Therefore, limit your awareness of what's going on around you.

[00:18:42] As well as glasses and helmets, we also have face masks. Now, we've provided you with some comprehensive information on the choice of face masks in relation to what you're covering. These range from N95 masks for COVID or any other kind of particles that you're trying to avoid all the way up to full face respirators for tear gas and pepper spray. And again, I encourage you to refer you to the resource where you can find this information when helping you to select the right equipment.

[00:19:20] When it comes to the rest of your body, also think about clothing, also think about light clothing that dries quick, think about wearing cotton clothing, especially if you're working in areas where there's a risk of fire, also a risk of Molotov cocktails, petrol bombs, because anything with a plastic base like polyester is going to stick to you if it does, unfortunately, set on fire. So make sure your clothing is relevant to where you're going.

Make sure your extremities are covered, longer sleeves. Think about your footwear, sturdy and robust to deal with the environment, hard wearing.

[00:20:00] Also, personally, as a woman, I tend to wear trousers with a thick belt, and I wear that because there's less risk of someone trying to pull off my clothing. In certain environments where I would consider it be a higher risk of sexual violence and harassment, I've worn a swimming costume underneath my clothing to protect my clothes from being pulled off. So again, clothing is part of your personal protective equipment. On top of that, you might want to think about knee guards, shin guards, elbows, things that are painful if they hit the ground, particularly in civil unrest.

[00:20:37] In addition to this, we might start thinking about using some kind of body protection, such as a stab vest or a ballistic vest. Now a ballistic vest is basically a plate carrier with ballistic plates, which is designed for protecting but not preventing injury from gunshots. The key thing here with ballistics is that these body armor with plates in are not designed to be bulletproof. There will still be some level of injury if you were to be hit in the plate by ammunition.

[00:21:16] So be careful about the use of body armor, if you put this on, it does not mean that you can put yourself at more risk from gunshots. It just means you are more protected from it. So actually, these are kind of the very last resort is to wear this equipment. What we need to look at is probably some stab protection or something that gives us some protection from other threats that we might experience if we're not working in areas where there's high risk of gun violence. If you cover in the United States, then you're going to need to be more aware of the ballistic protection that's available to you.

[00:21:56] And again, I refer to our resource here to be able to look at that so you can make the decisions about the right body armor for you. One thing I will encourage here is to make sure it fits. Make sure you get the right size, measure your chest. Measure from the top of your shoulder to the top of your belt line to make sure that your body armor fits there and make sure it's snug. If you've got big gaping holes around the arms, it's not going to offer you the right protection. Again, for a more female fitting body armor, you probably have to potentially choose smaller sizes and it's also uncomfortable, especially if you've got a larger chest.

[00:22:38] So make sure your underwear is supportive as well and perhaps get a thin vest to go in between as well, because sometimes if you're wearing for an extended period of time, it can rub as well. So and unfortunately, body armor is not made to fit a biologically female body or anyone with a larger chest. So spend some time fitting your body armor and choosing the right one for you. Avoid borrowing someone else's body armor, if at all possible. Again, you don't know the history, that body armor, you don't know how old it is. The ballistic plates don't last forever. They may have been involved in an incident, they can get damaged. So always get your own personal set of body armor and keep that for yourself.

[00:23:27] Again, there is support out there to get funding to buy safety equipment, and you can look at the IWMF Emergency Fund to help you with this. Remember, personal protective equipment is personal to you, so make sure that it fits and that you know where it is and you know when to carry it. Thanks for taking part in this first session with me, your lead instructor, Ali Baskerville, and join me for the second session. In the meantime, have a look at the required readings at the end of this module, as well as the optional resources.

And also take part in the quiz and log in to the discussion forum and I'll also see you for session two shortly.