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By *Cindy Atoji Keene* | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

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Providing '911' for international crises and disasters



Global Rescue founder Dan Richards says adventurers should be aware of what's going in areas where they travel, and should have a way to communicate. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

ON THE JOB...

Dan Richards has been watching the Ukraine crisis very carefully. As chief executive and founder of Boston private security firm Global Rescue, he's used to high-stakes rescue work in unstable regions. One way to think about Global Rescue, he said, is like an auto club that dispatches aid for stranded travelers — “but for the body, not the car.”

“Whether it's an individual tourist who needs assistance while traveling abroad or a potential mass evacuation for dozens of people,” said Richards, 40, “Global Rescue is ready to help members in need.”

What are you working on now, as far as crisis response or disaster planning?

Climbing season in the Himalayas starts at the end of this month, and we conduct about a dozen operations there every year.

Why are more employers realizing they need a crisis plan?

As organizations expand into new overseas markets, they are recognizing they need to monitor and protect employees. When you look at incidents of natural disaster, terrorism, and other crises over last 30 years, the trend is up.

How has social media changed the face of possible crises? Situations can escalate more quickly as news about demonstrations spreads quickly online. How does it change what you do?

It's true that social media has changed the nature of intelligence and

information gathering. But “open source” also can act as early warning signals that allow us to quickly gather information and rapidly mitigate the impact of a crisis.

What's the best advice that you can share with adventurers?

Number one, know the environment you're entering. Too often travelers see a pretty picture and say, “I'm going there,” without doing any research. Secondly, bring a way to communicate — a cellphone, SIM chip, or satellite device — so if you do have a problem, you can contact someone.

What country is the most difficult, logistically or politically, to deal with?

At the top of the list is North Korea.

You say that you haven't had a failed operation yet — but what came close?

We've never not been able to help a client; it's just a matter of how long it will take.

What's the riskiest thing you've ever done? Have any close calls?

One of the reasons I started the company was I had a close call as a collegiate athlete. I ruptured my spleen in a small town where the emergency crew didn't have the ability to provide good care or advice. This stuck with me my whole life. I wish I could have picked up the phone and gotten better advice.