
Case Study: Dow's Resilient Care Initiative in Saudi Arabia

How Dow supports employees and their families in a challenging location

Dow, winner of International SOS Foundation's 2016 Duty of Care Award in the category Resilient Care, faced many challenges when relocating 1,500 staff and family members to Saudi Arabia. It developed an extensive range of services to ensure the health and wellness of all employees and family members before and during the relocation. The established programme continues for current relocated staff and family members.

In 2011 The Dow Chemical Company and Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) announced the formation of Sadara — a major joint venture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). To build and start up the new integrated manufacturing hub and company would involve relocating around 1,500 Dow employees and family members.

As Johanna Söderström, Dow corporate vice president, Human Resources, points out: "Recruiting, relocating and retaining that many people is never easy; but this relocation was even more challenging than usual. It involved 30 different nationalities, many individuals who had never travelled abroad, and going to an unfamiliar location. Our commitment was to provide expats with a positive life experience and productive work environment."

The location itself brought further challenges: developing country conditions, culture shock, security risks, a harsh climate (heat, sand), health concerns (MERS, Ebola), high risk of vehicle accidents, and the

challenge of being in a vastly different environment in general.

To manage these many concerns Dow developed a comprehensive programme to ensure the well-being of its expat community. This contained a number of key elements.

An appropriate organisational model

At the very start of the project, an Executive Steering Committee was formed. It provided ongoing guidance and oversight of the whole process of selecting, relocating and supporting those employees who went to KSA. A series of support teams then carried out individual tasks. For example, a Mobility Team was formed to focus on relocating employees. These support teams were dedicated solely to the KSA project. This particular approach means employees receive excellent attention from functional experts with local knowledge.

Further ongoing support was provided by a Cross-Functional

'SWAT' Team of Human Resources (HR), Health Services, and Safety/Security. Functional Liaison Roles were established to collaborate with Sadara on employee issues.

Beyond the work environment, Guest Relations Offices were created for each compound to interface with compound management, to support the expat community and encourage social engagement. Also, a 24/7 KSA Support Centre provides concierge services, emergency support and issue resolution.

Comprehensive Assignment Readiness and Fitness Programmes

Pre-departure and post-arrival training and support were offered to employees and families to help them settle in their new environment. These were supplemented with monthly 'Ask the Saudi Expert' meetings, and a Buddy Programme.

On the social side, company-sponsored activities were held regularly, and special events



Top Arnaud Vaissié, Joseph Brewer, Ava Johnsey, Dr Ashish Mishra and Andrew Sharman. **Above** Johanna Söderström, Dow Corporate Vice President, Human Resources.



Top Sadara plants, Jubail Industrial City, KSA. **Above** Local and assignee cultural exchange.

hosted at the compounds. These range from sporting contests to dinner/dance parties and local tours.

Enhanced Safety and Security

Again the challenges were unique. As Söderström says, “The regional security concerns in KSA required a more robust programme than Dow had ever implemented elsewhere.”

All living compounds were subject to security vulnerability assessments. Periodic inspections, training and drills were regularly conducted at each one. Security was also a key factor in the selection of schools, hotels and malls for employees and their families to attend and patronise.

Another challenge in KSA was transportation. Road safety and legal issues in the event of an accident could have presented problems, and there were restrictions on women driving. To address this Dow worked with a local transportation company to provide solutions. All contracted drivers participated in defensive driver training and safety classes. All accidents and near misses were investigated. Emergency panic buttons, GPS tracking equipment, speed regulators

and tinted windows were fitted in all vehicles to promote safety. For any emergencies, a smartphone application called ICE (In Case of Emergency) Bridge was designed whereby users press a button to connect immediately with the KSA Support Centre for assistance.

Health and Wellness

As well as carrying out pre-assignment medical checks, significant medical support was arranged within KSA. A network of suitable hospitals was identified, supplemented by on-the-ground Dow Health services support to deal with acute health conditions. An Employee Assistance Programme offered confidential advice on personal, financial, legal and other matters.

The Dow KSA Crisis Management team conducted pandemic preparedness planning and employees received regular updates on MERS-CoV and other conditions. Ongoing health and wellness were encouraged with a variety of initiatives. There was no MERS infection of anyone in the Dow programme.

Communications Plans

Effective communications addressed the inevitable

concerns felt by expats in KSA. Quarterly sessions at each compound provide updates on HR, health services and safety/security issues. If threat levels are elevated, or significant events occurred, ICE Bridge provided immediate updates via SMS/text messaging.

More general health, cultural, security, travel, and immigration matters were reported in an expat newsletter sent to all employees, including information to be shared with their spouses. To help employees feel more connected with the corporate home location, ‘Townhall Sessions’ were held when senior Dow executives visited.

As Söderström concludes: “By addressing the concerns of the expat community, Dow created a caring and supporting environment for individual success and fulfilment. Our expats responded with resiliency and dedication to challenging life and work situations. Outstanding results, such as low attrition rates, high employee satisfaction and a high acceptance rate for assignment extensions, speak to the programme’s success.”

STEPS	BEST PRACTICES IN RESILIENT CARE
Step 1.	Establish an appropriate organizational model.
Step 2.	Facilitate comprehensive assignment readiness and fitness programmes.
Step 3.	Ensure safety and security of workforce.
Step 4.	Provide access to health and wellness programmes.
Step 5.	Communicate with expatriates and assignees.