

**The Seattle Times**

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## Travel / Outdoors

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Originally published August 14, 2012 at 12:03 PM | Page modified August 14, 2012 at 4:19 PM

### **Pack patience: Fires, storms, politics clogging summer travel**

From wildfires to hurricanes to political conventions, challenges are making travel tough through the summer.

By Amy Zipkin

The New York Times

Summer, with its often-violent storms, does not always mix well with business travel. But the wildfires in the West and high-security events like the London Olympics and two political conventions are making this summer particularly challenging.

For traveling in the West, for example, the wildfires that forced hotel evacuations and closings in Colorado in June were the start of a record-setting fire season that is expected to continue into October and November. For those headed east, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration last week raised its prediction of hurricanes this season.

"We are increasing the likelihood of an above-normal season because storm-conducive wind patterns and warmer-than-normal sea surface temperatures are now in place in the Atlantic," said Gerry Bell, the lead hurricane forecaster at the Climate Prediction Center.

Then, of course, there are the man-made high-security events, beginning with the Summer Games, which ended on Sunday in London, and continuing with the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Fla., from Aug. 27 to 30, with an expected 50,000 visitors, and the Democratic National Convention for three days in Charlotte, N.C., starting on Labor Day, which is expected to attract 35,000 people.

Along with anticipated protests, the conventions may lead to road closings and general disruptions. What this all means to business travelers and employers, said Wendy Lane, a labor and employment attorney with Greenberg Glusker in Los Angeles who drafts travel policies for corporate clients, is "an extra level of delay as airlines maximize efficiency by canceling flights and consolidating flights."

To deal with the unexpected, business travelers may need self-reliance and flexibility.

"The most important thing to pack is patience," said Henry Harteveltdt, chief research officer and co-founder of the Atmosphere Research Group in San Francisco.

He recommended that travelers explore alternative transportation options like trains and ferries. And he suggested carefully monitoring potential problems at their destination.

Exploring transportation alternatives made sense to Roy Berger, president and chief executive of MedjetAssist, a medical transport membership company in Birmingham, Ala. Berger said he was caught in a hailstorm at La Guardia Airport in New York in mid-July. Buttonholing the pilot of his flight to Birmingham, he learned that the gate attendant was about to announce the cancellation of the flight. Berger hailed a cab to Penn Station, where he caught a train south to

Baltimore. There, he was able to connect with another southbound plane with minutes to spare after persuading fellow passengers to let him cut in front of them at the security screening.

Weather, and other hazards, can now be better anticipated. Starting in late June, a system that sends emergency alerts via texts began operating on compatible cellphones. The system is the result of a partnership among the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Communications Commission and the wireless industry.

"This new public safety system allows customers who own an enabled mobile device in an area where their service provider has deployed the capability to receive geographically targeted textlike messages alerting them of imminent threats to safety in their areas," said Damon Penn, FEMA program director. Events like tornadoes, hurricanes, an active shooter or an industrial accident will be the subject of notifications. Almost all wireless carriers have signed on, but consumers need to check if the service is available in their area.

As to the impact of the Olympics, Mark Naysmith, the Games readiness director at Deloitte UK, based in London, began in 2009 to consult London-area clients about dealing with heightened security and transportation delays and traffic restrictions, all while anticipating a possible increase in business during the Olympics.

Some things did not quite work out as planned. While many consumer businesses, particularly in hospitality, leisure and retailing, experienced rises in demand, according to a survey the firm took during the first week of the Games, that bounce was less than they had expected earlier in the year.

The end of the summer will bring the quadrennial nominating conventions.

"Fair to say visitors are not going to be able to travel as freely as in a normal week in Charlotte and Tampa," said Daniel J. Kaniewski, deputy director of the Homeland Security Policy Institute at George Washington University.

Kaniewski said that in his experience, travelers should expect a range of issues, including, "fences, screening including metal detectors and rerouting transportation."

The possibility of such measures has given some Tampa businesses pause. Rhea F. Law, the chief executive and chairwoman at the law firm Fowler White Boggs, said she expected her office to start earlier, at 7:30 a.m., and close early while the convention was in town. Partners are being advised to work from home. The support staff will be paid their regular salary for shorter days.

Others are taking a more active approach. Douglas Brewer, an executive vice president at In-Rel, a property management firm that has its headquarters in Lake Worth, Fla., and offices in Tampa, said his firm sent an email advising tenants at the city's Rivergate complex to stay away and work from home if possible.

"I can see a half-hour commute turning into a two-hour commute," he said.

He anticipates having to juggle to arrange building deliveries and garbage removal, and expects cleaning to be suspended until the building returns to a normal schedule.

In Charlotte, Michael Smith, the president and chief executive of the Charlotte Center City Partners, a nonprofit group that cultivates economic development in the central business district, where the convention will be held, is optimistic. He said he was encouraging the area's 83,000 employees to come to work despite tight security and expected transportation disruptions. The light rail line that serves the area will skip at least two stops and pedestrian access to streets and businesses near the Bank of America Stadium will be limited.

And Smith acknowledged that it would be difficult to find hotel rooms for anyone other than conventioners.

"There will be no room at the inn," he said.

Sid Smith, executive director of the Charlotte Area Hotel Association, said business travelers might need to find lodging in Raleigh, a 2 1/2-hour drive away.

