

HOLIDAYMAKERS WARNED OF SAFETY RISKS

Holidaymakers venturing abroad this summer are being warned about safety hazards which could turn a fortnight of fun and sun into a nightmare.

As school holidays are now underway, many families are preparing to head overseas, but the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) is urging people not to leave their common sense behind.

Colin Ettinger, president of the organisation, says simple steps can prevent a holiday turning into a tragedy.

“We see, first-hand, the devastation an accident abroad can cause,” he said. “People do tend to throw caution to the wind on holiday, but the consequences of taking even small risks can be tragic.”

Having insufficient insurance cover for activities such as sky-diving or parascending – activities which are classed as hazardous – is just one example of where things can go horribly wrong.

“Many insurance companies won’t cover you for activities which they call hazardous, so if you are injured while taking part you won’t be able to claim any compensation,” he said. “It’s crucial that if you think you’ll be trying your hand at anything which may fall into this category, check your policy covers it. If you are in any doubt, ask before you go, and top up your insurance if you’re unsure.”

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APIL member Daniel Scognamiglio, who deals daily with claims in which people have been injured on holiday, says holiday makers often don't realise they may be heading for disaster. And an accident abroad will be twice as devastating because most people won't know the law, don't speak the language and are thousands of miles away from home," he said.

Daniel says people often forget that they are not immune to health and safety risks, just because they are on holiday.

"The law abroad can be different from UK law. For example in some countries wearing a seatbelt or crash helmet may not be compulsory, which leads people to be complacent," he said. "I see lots of young people who are injured on mopeds – some riding without helmets – and they forget the roads and other motorists are different from those back home."

Citing the case of two young girls whose lives were irrevocably damaged by an accident in the Mediterranean, Daniel says their story should serve as a warning to other holidaymakers.

"These two young girls were riding on a moped when another motorist ran straight into them," said Daniel. "Neither girl was wearing a helmet or the kind of clothing which may have protected them from the impact. They both suffered injuries which will be with them for the rest of their lives - one of the girls has a severe brain injury. Their youth has been taken from them."

To compound what was an already horrific accident, neither girl had medical or travel insurance, so the cost of medical expenses, arranging for someone to travel to care for them, and then flying back home in an air ambulance, was phenomenal. The costs had to be met by the family.

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“These financial pressures have added to trauma already suffered by the girls and their families,” said Daniel.

APIL is urging people to be vigilant, and to make sure they buy adequate insurance before they head off to the sun.

“If anything does go wrong, remember to inform the authorities – either the holiday representative or the police,” said Daniel, “and inform your insurer as soon as possible.

“The last thing we want is to put people off having fun, but not taking risks means you have a better chance of having a holiday to remember for all the right reasons.”

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Note to editors: The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) has around 5,000 members worldwide including solicitors, barristers, academics and students, who are dedicated to providing a voice for injured people. Our main objective is to ensure access to justice for injured people and focus on prevention of avoidable injuries.

APIL recently launched a new website – consumersafetywatch.com - to alert the public to safety hazards such as accidents on holiday and product recalls. The aim of the site is to prevent accidents happening in the first place and, if things do wrong, visitors can gain access to details of qualified, experienced solicitors who are members of the College of Personal Injury Law (CPIL).

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