



**Be Aware**  
**Take Care**

10 OF THE  
**BIGGEST**  
**RISKS**  
OF BUSINESS  
TRAVEL

[tony@beawaretakecare.com](mailto:tony@beawaretakecare.com)

[www.beawaretakecare.com](http://www.beawaretakecare.com)

01268 33 00 72

# 10 OF THE **BIGGEST RISKS** OF BUSINESS TRAVEL

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Business travel like any other business system will always be changing and adapting not only to technology and health issues such as the 2019/20 Covid-19 pandemic but also due to a change in personal preferences, costs and organisational structures and policy.

There remains an element of travel for key individuals travelling between international offices, staff secondments through to key client relationship or sales meetings.

The purpose of sharing these 10 tips is because knowing about them will place you in a far better position than you currently are in.

As you consider these points, I am sure your mind will generate other questions and scenarios and if you would like to discuss these then please drop me a message.

I fully appreciate that this article may challenge your thinking about your own travel methods and possibly your organisations policies, procedures and level of care. If no one shines a light on possible risks then the risks remain but they will not be recognised, unspecified, unrated, and unaddressed.

The more time you take to recognise and plan how to mitigate each of these risks and how they affect you and your staff, the more benefit you can get from the ideas this document will generate.

I can assure you that reflecting on risks often generates significant questions and ideas in the workshops I run. The power of this is that as people relate to these risks and see themselves in these situations, they then start to not only recognise but plan to avoid them where possible.

# 1 Hotels

A hotel room often feels like a place to relax, safe and secure and as a result we tend to treat it almost like a second home letting our guard down and putting ourselves at risk.

The first issue to be aware of is the check in

## ***The Helpful Receptionist***

*"Hello Mr Smith your room is number 452 and you will be staying with us for three nights?"*

The helpful receptionist announced to the 10 people nearby.

That's the prompt to leave reception and return quietly half hour later and ask for a change of room and request they don't announce it to anyone who could overhear.

Sounds a bit exaggerated and why make an issue of something so simple?

**Well let's see what could be happening here.**

- We have no idea who overheard the statement
- We don't know if someone in the vicinity would like to rob or harm us

For travellers not just female travellers who are alone this is a risk that you simply don't need and is completely unnecessary. Although unlikely it's possible the receptionist is involved in a scam of some kind and has just signalled their accomplice that you are to be the victim that day.

There are lots of people that could have legitimate access to your room such as housekeeping, security, and maintenance. If you then add the fact that some people who shouldn't be able to have access possibly do then you can see that you should control entry. Use a simple door stop or one of the special security devices to make sure your door cannot be opened while you sleep.

I recommend 2 different devices and carry both in case the door doesn't fit one of them. The DoorJammer and the Lifeventure door lock.

**Cheri Marchionda was traveling for work, staying at the Embassy Suites, in April 2014 when she was raped and battered in her room for more than two hours by Christopher Lapointe, of New York. Lapointe was given a key to her room by the front desk clerk, even though he didn't show ID or prove that he was a hotel guest, and then managed to convince hotel staff to disengage the door's interior security latch by telling them that he had been locked out of the room by his 'girlfriend'. (Shen,M. 2019)**

## 2 Your IP (Intellectual Property)

Many organisations fail to comprehend the value of their IP and how that IP affects their market position as well as the overall value of the organisation.

Your IP is what makes you competitive, differentiates you in the market and when breached can seriously affect your bottom line. In the *WannaCry ransomware attack* of 2017 cyber criminals used ransomware to prevent victims accessing their IP unless a ransom was paid.

Many organisations have either dedicated cyber security teams within their fraud prevention department while others include it within their IT or security departments. Most try and lock down their Intellectual property by various means, often involving the use of technology against hackers or malware and by educating or restricting access by employees. However, one of the biggest risks to your IP is not the hacker or concerted attack it's the people within your organisation, either as a result of human error or a disgruntled or financially incentivised employee.

Maintaining security for people accessing the systems remotely can become more difficult placing your IP at risk. Do remote employees have access via an unencrypted link from their ipad, laptop or smartphone? If the link is encrypted, is it difficult to use so that people download the information they need and store it on their personal device. Does everyone use a vpn or other security link on their phones, laptops and other devices all the time or is their data open and exposed once they disconnect from your secure link.

An instance that comes to mind for me was that of a stolen laptop where the individual had downloaded all their documents as the secure link was too slow when they were travelling. This was against company policy but as a Director they had persuaded IT to allow the downloads.

*A report issued by the US chamber of commerce stated that publicly traded U.S. companies own an estimated \$5 trillion worth of trade secrets. A report by PWC suggested that an estimate of the loss that could be attributed to the theft of trade secrets is between 1 and 3 percent of the US GDP (Yeh, B. 2016).*



# 3 Terrorism

Terrorism could impact your organisation in many ways including the targeting of your staff or organisation due to the country they or the organisation represents, your markets or products, political affiliations or who your customers are.

The aim of the terrorist is to cause as much of an impact as possible, often gaining significant international press and government coverage. The airport, flight, hotel, office, or mall your people are in could be the target. All would gain significant coverage and could result in loss of life, fear, cultural, political and reputational damage.

Methods of attack vary significantly including bomb or active shooter attacks that may be targeted at your staff or organisation or they could be collateral damage as an attack targets someone or something else.

One area of organisation risk responsibility and duty of care would be the country risk assessment (This normally initiates a long sigh from everyone). Now, in my experience very few travellers have ever read one, many organisations don't provide them and if they do its purely as a tick box for the insurance. Those that do have them never check the read stats to see if they have been accessed by whom and when. It's quite possible that your organisation has a full set of country risk assessments, maybe they are even updated but has anyone ever read them.

I can't imagine any of the Directors or Partners I worked with over the years sitting down and reading a long risk assessment unless they were going somewhere featured in the headlines such as Iraq. Risk assessments are too often written and then forgotten when they should be helpful and the font of knowledge. They should be accessible by smartphone and have a particularly good summary which is all most will ever read.

A simple tip for all travellers is to check the UK and USA government country bulletins before you travel and then have them on your twitter feed, so you receive updates on local issues as you travel.

Travelling or working in Europe can seem very safe compared to some places in the world however the annual TESAT(2018) report from Europol continues to highlight both Jihadist and right wing terrorism across Europe with France and the UK experiencing the highest number of attacks and arrests followed by Belgium. Many organisations would not consider an employee on secondment to their Paris office as 'at risk' but some level of understanding of possible local tensions would certainly be a good recommendation.



***Terrorism is a major threat for businesses (Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, 2020) In November 2015, a terrorist cell conducted a series of coordinated attacks in Paris, using firearms and suicide bombs, killing 130 people and injuring 368 more. This was the most sophisticated western attack carried out by DAESH, involving at least nine operatives and using multiple weapons including automatic firearms and person-borne improvised explosive devices (PBIEDs).***

# 4 Natural disasters

*An 8.9 magnitude earthquake struck near Toyo, Japan (Haridasani, A .2011) triggering tsunami warnings across the region and closing Japanese airports.*



Natural disasters can occur without warning but very often they are, if not predicted then thought to be highly likely. Earthquakes, tsunami, forest fires and floods as well as many other natural issues could easily leave your people stranded without transport, shelter, or provisions.

The timeline of how to plan and manage through a natural disaster is significant. Firstly, there is preparedness and planning (which of course should be in your country risk assessment), there is the actual incident which for both those directly involved and their family at home can be terrifying. Then there is the period of time immediately following the incident and the following week.

Following the incident people who survived may be at risk due to a second incident, falling buildings, lawlessness, dehydration, or medical issues. What action plan for those involved and communication plan is there for dealing with relatives of your staff who survived, missing, or confirmed dead.

Depending on the incident it could be the environment as well as other people that are going to cause you immediate and further harm. It's easy to assume that everyone pulls together for the greater good following a disaster but that may not be the case. Rape, assault, robbery and looting may be some people's response.

If unprepared, then knowing how to keep safe from further natural developments as well as your surroundings is

essential, while understanding the process and plan of how to extract yourself or be extracted is key and should be understood beforehand.

Planning in advance and everyone knowing that a plan not only exists but how to activate it, manage it and adjust it as events develop is essential. Who within your organisation is responsible for any of your staff in the vicinity or who may otherwise be affected by a natural disaster? Do you have an emergency policy, possibly as part of your insurance that enables you to contact an external agency or does someone in house manage the situation? Who does what and when must be known beforehand.

It is important to recognise that indirect events may impact or affect your people and organisation. For example, a manufacturing centre could be destroyed, or staff could be isolated due to lack of international travel as often happens following a volcanic eruption.

*Following the 2005 floods in New Orleans there were reports of rape, murder and violence (Rezaeian, M. 2013) although later it appeared these were exaggerated (Smith-Spark, L. 2005). 2 of the 14 bodies at the convention centre used as a shelter during the disaster were found with gunshot wounds and the Louisiana Foundation against sexual assault stressed that just because a rape hasn't been reported to police doesn't mean it didn't happen.*

# 5 Travel Hubs - Airports & Rail stations

Air Travel is one of the safest methods of transport and is probably one of the most open about its safety with the annual ICAO report available for everyone to read.

As far as personal safety is concerned airports are split into 2 areas, Airside and Public with airside being the part once you go through security. Airside the risks involve petty crime such as luggage theft along with significant threats such as terrorism. However, this is much reduced since everyone should have passed through security. Airport staff and contractors who work airside normally have security checks on them as well as also having to pass through security checks to enter the airside section of the airport.

The public space is a significant area of concern with large numbers of people carrying heavy bags and backpacks being the norm, all of which have not been checked by security. People are funnelled together as they check in or

approach security making them a significant target. This was the principle behind the 2015 Brussels and the 1988 Glasgow airport attacks.

When you attend an airport, train station or other transport hub your main goal should be to split yourself from the mass of unchecked people. In airports this is easier as you can pass through the security checks although some countries have similar security clearance at major rail or bus stations.

Get airside or through security and on your train or bus as soon as you can as this minimises your exposure to such a large group of people in an open area.

If meeting colleagues or friends pass through security and then meet them rather than meeting in the area used by the general public.



*17 people were killed many more injured in the Brussels airport attacks in 2016 with 2 blasts in the airport departure area by suicide bombers (BBC, 2016).*

*38 people were killed and 60 injured in the 2010 suicide bombings carried out by 2 female terrorists in the rush hour at 2 stations on the Moscow Metro (CNN, 2010).*

## 6 Cultural Assumptions

Do not assume your own cultural and personal measures of your legal and social rights and laws apply around the globe they do not.

It can become easy to assume that your normal is everyone else's normal, your principles, morals, prejudices, and assumptions will not be the same as someone else's.

Someone somewhere thinks that because you have a short skirt on, your head uncovered, you have a smart suit or some other signal that maybe only they identify with then you are wrong, and in their eyes a potential target.

Is that right, no it isn't but if you ignore this you are putting yourself at possible risk. By all means, when safe to do so campaign to change people's opinions, campaign for equal rights but don't ignore the fact that some may have the opposite view to you. In times of conflict or abuse right or wrong do not matter as long as someone has a belief, and they are willing to act on it.

The same applies for LGBTQ rights, what is acceptable to most people in the UK will land you in jail in some countries. If you ignore the fact that even in the UK there are individuals and groups that remain hostile to people living their lives as they wish you could be significantly increasing your risk of assault. I'm not saying don't live your life as you wish what I am saying is be alert to the people, customs, and environment around you.

Remember that if the absolute worst case happens and you are the victim of crime or sexual assault and you aren't in your home country contact your embassy or consulate immediately for assistance and support. Unfortunately, in some countries you won't be seen as a victim if you report a crime or sexual assault to the police and you could find you are ignored or even arrested.

*In 2016 an English woman was arrested in Dubai after reporting being raped by 2 men. After much pressure from the UK Government and Human rights groups she was eventually released and allowed to leave the country (Malo, S. 2016).*



# 7 No possession is worth risking your life



We put far too much emphasis on not losing possessions and we give them far too much importance. This brings the ego into play and is the element few consider in any risk assessments and training yet in my opinion is the thing that is most likely to get you seriously hurt, assaulted and possibly killed.

I often ask people how much money they would give to be able to return home that night, safe, rather than giving up their life alone and in pain bleeding to death while loved ones worry as they haven't returned home.

Yes, that is hard but it's also real and one area we discuss repeatedly throughout my workshops and training events. I like to use examples from errors I have personally made and often within minutes the participants provide many of their own examples. We are all lucky of course, having survived to tell others of these mistakes so that they can learn.

For many years I have told the story of a very senior member of staff who attended one of my workshops. When discussing muggings and robbery he stated that no one would take his wallet, instead he would fight. How dare they take what he had worked so hard for.

This from a man who had not had a fight since junior school many years ago. When asked if he would show his wallet, we

*No possession is worth risking your life for. Reacting to a noise Michael Samwell a Naval officer went to investigate but unfortunately was killed attempting to prevent his car being stolen (Maan, T 2017)*

found only a tiny amount of cash alongside plastic cards and a driving licence. This was a wealthy senior executive so why then would he risk his life to fight someone for a few pieces of plastic.

What you must remember is that the thief, attacker, or drug addict needing their next high has made their career not by working long hours in the office but by long hours committing robbery and assault. They have probably already served at least one prison term and are not scared of any repercussions.

Why risk your life and the future of your loved ones for what you would earn in less than 10 minutes. Yes, it's hard to accept defeat and hand over your wallet, watch or ring without a fight but if you managed to purchase it once you can do so again.

Anyway, everything is probably insured.

## 8 Entertaining

For those drinking in crowded places that you are unfamiliar with remember the drink aware campaigns that ran a couple of years ago. These campaigns highlighted the issue of someone adding something to your drink.

Assume these warnings were only for single young females out partying and you make the mistake of risking your life. They apply to everyone regardless of status, occupation, sex or position.

There are many drugs that when added to a drink leave you appearing drunk, confused or possibly unconscious. These drugs are readily available and include Rohypnol, GHB and ketamine which are probably the most discussed. The time it takes for the drugs to take effect differs and so does the time they remain active. Depending on the drug and the amount used you might seem drunk which is why people including security staff sometimes don't come to your aid.

These substances are sometimes known as date rape drugs, but experts prefer the designation drug-facilitated sexual assault, but in fact they don't only lead to sexual assaults and definitely not just sexual assaults on young women.

Drugs can leave you in a state that leaves you unprotected for a huge range of crimes from pickpocketing, cashpoint theft, through kidnapping to rape. Total collapse may not be the desired effect from the attacker. They may prefer a state of relaxed compliance so that suspicion isn't raised if staff at the venue are not involved.

Drugs like this can be easily added to drinks by either the bar staff or someone tampering with a drink especially after a couple of alcoholic drinks have had their effect, so you don't notice.

Open topped drinks are a significant risk area especially when left while you go to the toilet, dancefloor or leave them unattended in any other way.

As with many assaults the principle of splitting the herd is the method of many assailants. So, if out for a drink with colleagues in the evening be additionally alert if you are separated from the group. Once no longer part of the group you are potentially a future victim.



Across England & Wales there were 2650 reported incidents of drinks being spiked between 2015-2019 72% of who were female (Robinson, B. 2019).

When considering safety of employees, it is far too easy to overlook the obvious.

Traffic accidents are more likely to cause serious injury or death than any other type of incident. Terrorism and other events may hit the headlines but by far the riskiest activity is normal transport.

Key messages that an organisation needs to be considering are the region and method of travel and if local or international options for travel are available. For example, the use of a local taxi shuttle in some regions would be my last choice of travel however there are sometimes international organisations in country that could be booked and arranged in advance.

International booked travel options could also include an element of close protection (CPO) to provide personal safety to the person travelling, especially useful in areas of conflict or lawlessness. There are many levels of CPO, they could be firearms trained and carrying or they could be unarmed, working alone or as a team.

The fact that the World Health Organisation reports on traffic accidents is significant but the dangers across the world are not all at a similar level with certain regions and countries experiencing much higher rates of injury and death. For a snapshot of the level of deaths per region the active map below can be used as a high-level guide.

<https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/cause-of-death/road-traffic-accidents/by-country/>

According to the WHO 1.2 million people die in road traffic accidents each year (Peden et.al. 2004).



# 10 Crowded Spaces



Just about everything above can be an issue in crowded spaces. Sexual assault, robbery, terrorism and even traffic can be an issue in crowded spaces.

There is a largely held belief that being in a crowd makes you safe. That feeling of being anonymous and part of a large group giving comfort and a feeling of safety in numbers that as social beings we often relax our instinctive warnings as we feel like we belong to the group. However, pickpockets and terrorists along with a range of other people with bad intentions will always be attracted to these areas. The opportunity to merge with a crowd and seemingly disappear is an attractive proposition to many. This applies to most crowds be it a shopping centre, a festival, trade fair or celebration.

Some years ago, I was sitting at a café with my wife in Barcelona when someone who I initially thought was the waiter placed a pile of tourist leaflets on the table. When we said we weren't interested they left without argument. Now I have been doing this a long time and have discussed this exact scenario on a number of occasions, but I was still taken as a victim. As the person walked off, they had picked up their leaflets along with a number of our items that were on the table. As they moved away, they removed their jacket in an attempt to disguise themselves as they merged with the crowd if we were to follow.

*30% of female festival goers have faced assault or harassment with only 2% being reported to Police. (BBC, 2018)*

In this instance they did not get away with anything but in stopping them that in itself was a risk and not one I would recommend most people to take. However that is a great learning experience within the workshops as people recognise that anyone at any time can become a victim and that the rule of not allowing your ego to overrule your abilities to protect your possessions is relevant to everyone.

In 2017 this same area was the target of an Islamist terror attack when a van was driven into pedestrians in what would have been a very busy section of the tourist district.

It is not just the crowded space itself that is an issue but also the transition as you decide to leave the crowd behind. Anyone seeking a victim can easily identify someone leaving the crowd and follow. If possible, always be alert, and aware of what is happening around you and if possible, from a purely safety standpoint I would suggest you avoid overly crowded places.

*16 people were killed, 140 injured from 35 countries in the attack on La Rambla, Barcelona on 17th August 2017 (Rodriguez, J 2018)*

# About the Author

I spent many years working at a senior level in several large organisations, travelling extensively on behalf of the business. I was often asked what colleagues should do to avoid conflict or what they should have done when unfortunately, it had all gone wrong.

Avoiding conflict is absolutely key, but most people do not know how to do that. Identifying and managing risk is something that many businesspeople do all the time as part of their role but simply do not understand how to apply that principle to ensure their own safety.

I believe that people should be aware of how to recognise and plan for risks and how to mitigate them adapting that plan as events unfold and the risks change. In business we are good at understanding and managing risk but often turn this ability off unconsciously as we walk out of the office.

I have used my experience as a business traveller coupled with a Masters in Counter Terrorism from UCLAN and over 40 years of martial arts training to develop a uniquely detailed knowledge of problems that actually occur when travelling as part of your occupation.

I am a published author, gained a master's degree from UCLAN in Counter Terrorism and have previously held UK Government, NATO and London's Metropolitan Police security clearance.

I run workshops and offer support both in the UK and mainland Europe on how organisations can ensure the safety of their staff.



Tony Willis MSc MBA FCMI ASyI



# How I can help you

Whether it's handling the daily commute, navigating foreign cities, understanding terrorist activity or simply being aware of potential threats. The training provided along with the tried and tested techniques and tips will help you and your teams stay safe when going about your work.

Although the fundamental principles and foundation remain the same no two courses are likely to be the same as the attendees will have had different experiences, be at varying levels of seniority, experience different risk factors and undertake different tasks throughout their day.



## 3 ways we can work together to ensure your people stay safe

### The Workshop

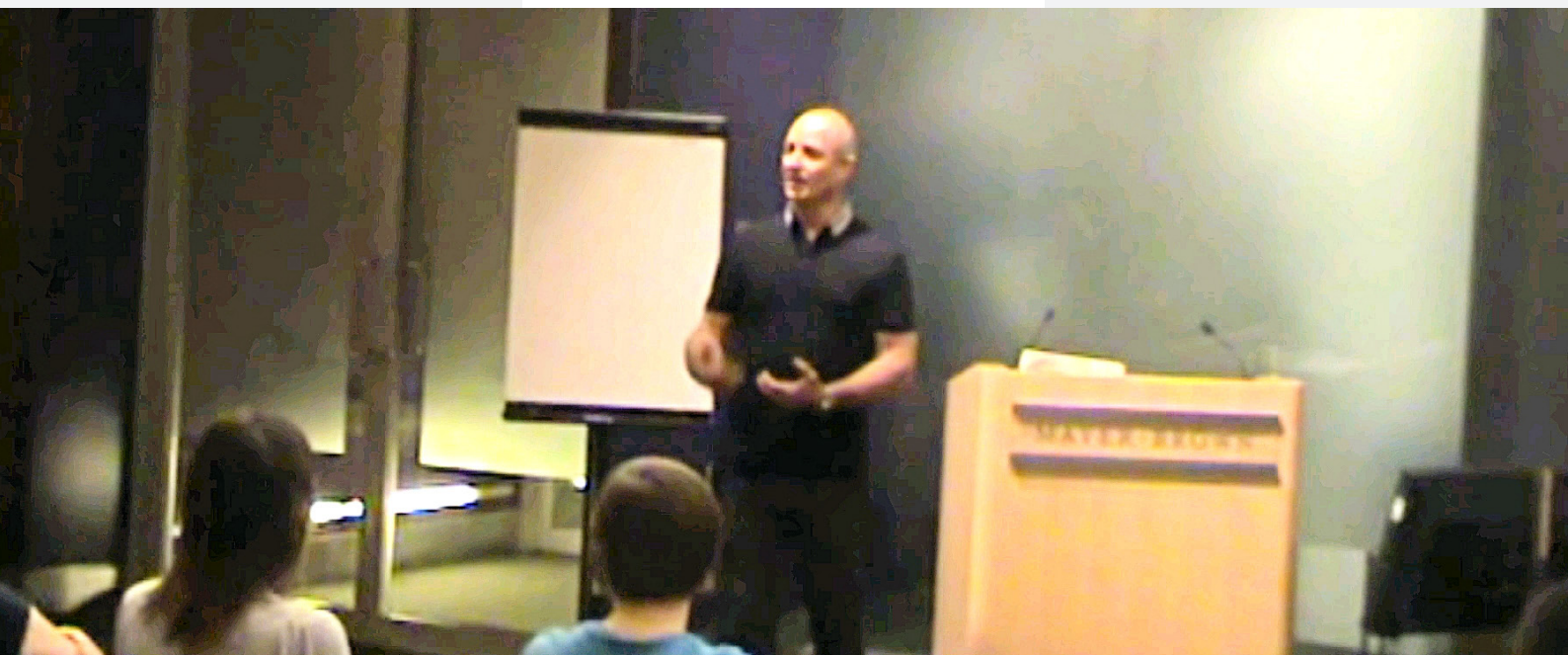
Workshops of up to 12 people normally from 10am to 3pm following my 3-step system we go into detail on areas that apply specifically to those attending. This gives a sound platform they can use in the future to both plan and react to any risks as they develop.

### Annual support programme

Starting with the workshop as the foundation and then as part of a Mastermind Group providing individual personal support throughout the year including WhatsApp, zoom, and email in using the 3 step system and risks that may become apparent.

### Keynote

A keynote or conference format of about 1 hour. – Tailored to the company and audience either through role or level.



# What people have said

"Recently, Tony Willis was invited to give a conference in our organisation. He presented the concept Be aware – stay safe developed by himself. We discovered a very interesting approach of self-protection and we were amazed by all the good tips and tricks he provided us with. Very useful for all those who are travelling from time to time, whether for professional or personal reasons."

*Birgit Ben Yedder, Admin Asst, The European Commission, Luxembourg*

"Business travelling is getting more and more uncomfortable with increased pressures on time and reduced budgets, especially in the big cities like Berlin, London and Paris. Rushing from one meeting to the next often under significant stress business travellers are especially vulnerable. Advice on how to avoid difficult situations and maintain personal safety in these situations is absolutely essential for today's business community..."

*Hans-Peter Portner, Global Transition & Transformation Manager*



"Being a frequent traveller, I know the importance of avoiding conflict and Tony Willis has successfully captured the essentials on what to look for and how to act"

*Magnus Lundgren, Strategic Sales Director Ericsson*

"Having known Tony professionally for a few years when I read his book 'Be Aware Take Care' I knew the message he was passing on was not only important for our client base here in Luxembourg but also would make a great presentation. His Presentation was great, and he got booked on the day to go to one of our clients to share his message to their team, I would highly recommend Tony".

*Lynn Holland - Tower Training*

## How to Get in Touch

Contact me directly by my direct phone: 01268 33 00 72

Email : [tony@beawaretakecare.com](mailto:tony@beawaretakecare.com)

Web: [www.5-elements.co.uk](http://www.5-elements.co.uk)

LinkedIn: <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/tonywillisuk>

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