



International Civil Aviation Organization

**THE TENTH MEETING OF ASIA/PACIFIC OPMET MANAGEMENT
TASK FORCE (OPMET/M TF/10)**

Bangkok, Thailand, 17 – 19 April 2012

Agenda Item Conjoint: SIGMET

d) Advisory information

VOLCANIC ASH ADVICE

(Presented by Australia)

SUMMARY

The Volcanic Ash (VA) SIGMET and Volcanic Ash Advisory (VAA) are largely or completely overlapping products in terms of their purpose and audience, leading to issues of precedence and confusion where they are in conflict. Given that they are both advisory and that a great amount of time and effort has gone into establishing the Volcanic Ash Advisory Centres (VAACs) as best-practice regional centres for the volcanic hazard, and given that it is well understood that many or most airlines already use VAA for guidance it is proposed to cease the requirement for issuance of VA SIGMET from the next amendment of Annex 3.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Discussions within the International Volcanic Ash Task Force (IVATF) (refer to task number TF-VAA13) requests consideration of the reduction or elimination of information overload during volcanic eruptions, with the deliverable

“Review the current processes regarding the issuance of aeronautical and meteorological information (i.e. VAA/VAG, SIGMET, NOTAM/ASHTAM) in view of reducing or eliminating information overload concerns, taking into account the progress report/proposals emanating from task TF-ATM06 presented at IVATF/3 by the ATM SG”

1.2 A long standing point of discussion at IAVWOPSG and in other fora has been the requirement to issue SIGMETs in circumstances where Advisory messages already exist (ie. for Volcanic Ash and Tropical Cyclones). The rationale behind the establishment of the Volcanic Ash Advisory Centres (VAAC) and Tropical Cyclone Advisory Centres (TCAC) was to provide regional expertise to assist MWOs in advising of particular, complex hazards. In practice, Volcanic Ash has proved to be extremely complex in many circumstances, and due to this and the often problematic nature of SIGMET issuance, timeliness, and cross-border coordination, many or most airline carriers actually use the VAA as their principal decision-making tool. In practical terms, this leads to issues of:

- Multiple redundant messages, in cases where the SIGMETs and the VAAs are issued simultaneously with the same information;
- Inconsistent messages where VA SIGMET and VAA have differing information or are out of synch for the same airspace;
- Dangerous situations, particularly where owing to technical issues, SIGMETs are current for some States but not others when a VAA is current over a wider area; and
- Potential legal uncertainties resulting from the above.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Discussions on these issues in the past have run up against a hurdle in terms of the perceived need to upgrade the VAA to ‘warning’ status, and the resultant issues around the rights and responsibilities of States and VAACs. The IVATF has assisted in resolving this situation by:

- Clarification that both VAA and SIGMETs have advisory status;
- The issuance of Document 9974, Flight Safety and Volcanic Ash, which clarifies operator responsibility and clearly articulates the role of the VAA in the operator’s risk assessment process; and
- The ‘Best Practices’ process, which will result in a higher degree of confidence in the authority of VAAC advice.

2.2 Given the above, and provided that the strong role of States in reporting and observing volcanic ash and coordinating with operators and VAACs is maintained (or even enhanced), there would appear to be no reason to maintain both VA SIGMETs and VAA. To ensure that most efficient and volcanic ash service is delivered, and in recognition of the issues raised in 1.2 above, it is proposed to remove the requirement for States to issue VA SIGMETs.

2.3 Further efficiencies can be realized with the reduction in the overhead, both administrative and operational, of establishing bi-lateral agreements where States cannot maintain a VA SIGMET service.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 It is recommended that consideration be given to the removal of VA SIGMETs from Annex 3 SARPs.

4. ACTION BY THE MEETING

4.1 The meeting is invited to note the information and recommendation contained in this paper and provide comment to be forwarded to the IAVWOPSG.
