



ICAO

TENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL AVIATION SAFETY GROUP - ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS (RASG-APAC/10)

(Bangkok, Thailand, 17-18 December 2020 on Virtual Platform)

Agenda Item 5: ICAO / Member State / Industry Presentations

MANAGING AVIATION SAFETY RISKS ARISING FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(Presented by Singapore and Thailand)

SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the aviation industry. In most parts of the world, aircraft operations have sharply declined, while aircraft are grounded and crew placed on furlough as the industry grapples with the economic impact. Border restrictions and national lockdowns have also inhibited crew's access to training and medical facilities which is critical for the crew to remain proficient.

These developments have presented the industry with safety risks that must be properly managed. As the aviation industry strives to recover, it is imperative that the recovery is done so in a safe manner.

Action: The Meeting is invited to:

- (a) Recognise the good work by the ICAO APAC Regional Office and the ICAO Asia-Pacific COVID-19 Contingency and Recovery Planning Group (ACCRPG) in addressing the aviation safety related risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in support of the aviation safety-related recommendations made by the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force;
- (b) Encourage States/Administrations to put in place the necessary mitigating measures to manage the associated risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to share their experience at ACCRPG and/or APRAST; and
- (c) Request the ICAO APAC Regional Office to conduct a survey on the key risks faced by States/Administrations, the mitigating measures implemented as well as challenges faced, and to share the survey results at the next APRAST meeting to encourage exchange of best practices amongst States/Administrations.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the aviation industry. In some States/Administrations, aircraft operations have been severely reduced. At its peak, almost two third of the global aircraft fleet were estimated to have been grounded¹ while thousands of flight and cabin crew have been furloughed or made redundant. The financial positions of many aviation companies, including airlines, are also buffeted by the pandemic.

¹ Source: Cirium: The Airline Insights Report (September 2020)

1.2 This paper outlines the aviation safety risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses the importance of safety as the aviation industry strives to recover as well as the need for the exchange of best practices and lessons learned to support the region's recovery efforts.

2. COVID-19 RELATED SAFETY RISKS

2.1 Despite the reduction in aircraft operations, aviation safety risks continue to exist and must remain a top priority for aviation safety regulators. Notably, while air traffic has dropped in 2020, there have already been five fatal accidents compared to the six fatal accidents in 2019².

2.2 International organisations such as the International Air Transport Association, Flight Safety Foundation, Airports Council International as well as States/Administrations such as the European Union Aviation Safety Agency and the Federal Aviation Administration have identified several risks arising from the pandemic. Some of these risks are:

- a) **Operating an unairworthy aircraft.** A significant number of aircraft have been grounded globally due to the reduction in number of aircraft operations. Factors such as a lack of proper aircraft preservation or de-preservation efforts when returning to service as traffic recovers, could impact the airworthiness of these aircraft.
- b) **Crew proficiency.** The frequency which crew perform their flight duties has dropped significantly. This is reflected by the number of COVID-19 Contingency Related Differences (CCRDs) filed by States/Administrations with respect to pilots being unable to maintain their flying recency (i.e. conducting 3 take-offs and landings in each 90-day period). A prolonged period of low flying hours can affect the proficiency of pilots in the long run. The loss of access to flight simulation training devices due to the border restrictions also poses challenges to States/Administrations.
- c) **Mental health.** In addition to coping with the uncertainty surrounding their livelihoods, crew are also required to take on additional responsibilities to safeguard their health and those of their colleagues, as well as of passengers, during their duties. These include wearing of appropriate personal protective equipment, frequent cleaning of lavatories as well as various pre- and post-flight measures such as self-isolation during layover. These additional stresses and work demands could result in degradation in mental health and affect their ability to discharge the necessary safety responsibilities during a flight. Similar mental health issues could affect ground crew such as maintenance engineers as well.
- d) **Reduced safety oversight due to lockdown or movement restrictions.** Lockdown or movement restrictions have created challenges to States/Administrations to maintaining the frequency and comprehensiveness of surveillance audits during these times, through virtual or other means.
- e) **Degradation in safety management systems and loss of safety expertise due to furlough and redundancies.** As airlines and aviation companies restructure to deal with the financial impact of the pandemic, core safety capabilities or functions must not be compromised. On the contrary, a strong core safety management system provides the bedrock for safe and efficient recovery.

² Source: ICAO integrated Safety Trend Analysis and Reporting System (iSTARS)

3. WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR RECOVERY

3.1 ICAO has taken the lead in ensuring the continued safety of international operations. For instance, ICAO has developed Quick Reference Guides to guide States/Administrations in addressing safety risks arising from alleviations granted under the CCRD. ICAO, through the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) has also adopted four aviation safety related recommendations over the two Phases of CART. These recommendations are:

<p>Recommendation 1 (Phase I)</p>	<p>During the global COVID-19 outbreak, Member States should continue updating COVID-19 Contingency Related Differences (CCRDs) in the Electronic Filing of Differences (EFOD) subsystem.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2 (Phase I)</p>	<p>Member States should avoid retaining any COVID-19 related alleviation measures as soon as normal operations are resumed. Differences that remain after the contingency if any should be filed in the EFOD system.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3 (Phase I)</p>	<p>Member States should expedite the development of guidance for safety management of new operations or operation change during this crisis.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12 (Phase II)</p>	<p>States should put in place the necessary measures to mitigate risks associated with prolonged regulatory alleviations and should not extend alleviations (both core and extended CCRDs) beyond 31 March 2021, unless circumstances dictate otherwise. In addition, States are encouraged to facilitate access to medical and training facilities, including flight simulation training devices used for flight crew (national and foreign) to maintain their certifications, recency of experience and proficiency.</p>

3.2 To support the APAC States/Administrations, the ICAO APAC Regional Office had in June 2020 set up the Asia-Pacific COVID-19 Contingency and Recovery Planning Group (ACCRPG) to coordinate the regional implementation of the recommendations from CART, including those related to aviation safety. The ACCRPG has been useful in driving safety initiatives. For instance, the ACCRPG developed a guidance document on the usage of PPE by flight crew in a cockpit. Discussions were also initiated on the facilitation of pilots travel for the purposes of accessing flight simulators to complete training or proficiency checks.

3.3 As States/Administrations develop plans and guidance from ICAO and work with their industry partners to recover from this pandemic, there are opportunities for sharing of information and ideas among States/Administrations to improve safety outcomes and improve passenger confidence in air travel. The intent is to share experiences in implementation of the guidelines and practices in managing issues related to COVID-19 related safety risks, not limited only to risks arising from CCRDs, including those mentioned in paragraph 2.2. These coordination and mutual sharing efforts can collectively improve the ability of the inter-connected APAC region to recover from the pandemic safely.

3.4 In this regard, the ICAO APAC Regional Office can play a useful role in coordinating this regional effort. Exchange of ideas can take place at ACCRPG and APRAST meetings. Furthermore, the ICAO APAC Regional Office could develop a survey on the key risks faced by States/Administrations, their mitigating measures as well as challenges faced. The survey results can be

shared with other States/Administrations at the next APRAST meeting, to encourage sharing of best practices in the implementation of mitigation measures.

4. ACTION BY THE MEETING

4.1 The Meeting is invited to:

- a) Recognise the good work by the ICAO APAC Regional Office and the ICAO Asia-Pacific COVID-19 Contingency and Recovery Planning Group (ACCRPG) in addressing the aviation safety related risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in support of the aviation safety-related recommendations by the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force;
- b) Encourage States/Administrations to put in place the necessary mitigating measures to manage the associated risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to share their experiences at ACCRPG and/or APRAST; and
- c) Request the ICAO APAC Regional Office to conduct a survey on the key risks faced by States/Administrations, the mitigating measures implemented as well as challenges faced, and to share the survey results at the next APRAST meeting to encourage exchange of best practices amongst States/Administrations.

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