



ICAO

SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL  
AVIATION SAFETY TEAM (APRAST/16)

Bangkok, Thailand, 17 to 18 March 2021 on Virtual Platform

APRAST/16–WP/11  
Agenda Item 5

**Agenda Item 5: Presentations – State / Industry / ICAO**

**MANAGING AVIATION SAFETY RISKS ARISING FROM  
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

*(Presented by Singapore)*

**SUMMARY**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the aviation industry. In many parts of the world, aircraft operations are slowly recovering from sharp declines, while aircraft remain 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. Much work has been done by ICAO to address the immediate safety concerns, including but not limited to the publication of guidance material and the introduction of COVID-19 Contingency Related Differences (CCRDs) to support States/Administrations.

As the aviation industry strives to recover, it is imperative to also identify and monitor longer term risks that accompanies the recovery process. This risk identification and mitigation process could be done through existing APRAST mechanisms.

**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 supporting the aviation safety-related recommendations made by the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force; and
- (b) Request the APRAST and its working groups to evaluate and identify safety risks relevant to the Asia-Pacific region that have been brought about by COVID-19, taking into consideration the safety risks highlighted in paragraphs 2.1 and 3.1, and the outcomes of the survey circulated by the Secretariat via SL 040/21, and to include the outcomes of the evaluation in the ICAO APAC Annual Safety Report 2021.

**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 thirds of the global aircraft fleet were estimated to have been grounded<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Cirium: The Airline Insights Report (September 2020)

1.2 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 2019<sup>2</sup>.

## **2. ADDRESSING THE IMMEDIATE COVID-19 RELATED SAFETY RISKS**

2.1 At the onset of the pandemic, international organisations and States/Administrations were swift in identifying the immediate-term safety risks confronting the international aviation community. These risks include reduction in crew proficiency due to prolonged period of low flying hours, degradation of crew mental health due to uncertainty surrounding their livelihoods, deterioration in aircraft airworthiness due to aircraft preservation challenges, and reduced safety oversight due to lockdown or movement restrictions.

2.2 The APAC region has done good work in addressing these immediate safety challenges. In June 2020, the ICAO APAC Regional Office 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. Such efforts have benefitted States/Administrations in addressing safety challenges that were unique to the APAC region.

## **3. BUILDING RESILIENCE IN AVIATION SAFETY**

3.1 As the pandemic stretches on, there are also risks associated with prolonged inactivity and air travel recovery that the region should prepare to address, to build resilience in aviation safety. In addition to the risks identified in paragraph 2.1, longer-term risks associated with prolonged inactivity include loss of familiarity with safety processes and lowered attention on safety management matters due to low volumes of aviation activity. The use of exemptions, while necessary to cope with disruptions posed by the COVID-19 situation in some circumstances, presents the need for additional safeguards and proactive management of risk. States/Administrations and industry would also need to grapple with the longer-term effects of decisions taken during this period, such as loss of safety expertise due to furloughs and early retirements and the impact on safety culture.

3.2 The risks associated with the air travel recovery process are of growing importance as many States/Administrations start to experience increases in air traffic. For example, efforts should be made to ensure safety oversight capabilities are able to handle any potential surge in air travel recovery resulting in sharp increase in demand for reinstatement of crew and aircraft. Proper retraining of crew and de-preservation of aircraft will be crucial.

3.3 In December 2020, the RASG-APAC/10 had recognised the importance of incorporating such risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic to be included in subsequent APAC Annual Safety Reports, and requested a survey to be conducted on the key risks faced by States/Administrations in the APAC region. The survey questionnaire was circulated by the ICAO APAC Regional Office via State Letter 040/21 on 3 March 2021. These efforts will be useful in determining COVID-19 related safety risks that may impact the APAC region and aligning the region's collective efforts towards building resilience in aviation safety.

3.4 These developments present an opportunity for APRAST and its working groups (SRP WG and SEI WG) to more closely align its outputs with COVID-19 issues by identifying safety risks that could accompany recovery beyond the immediate term, and developing relevant SEIs to assist States/Administrations.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: ICAO integrated Safety Trend Analysis and Reporting System (iSTARS)

**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 supporting the aviation safety-related recommendations by the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force; and
- b) Request the APRAST and its working groups to evaluate and identify safety risks relevant to the Asia-Pacific region that have been brought about by COVID-19, taking into consideration the safety risks highlighted in paragraphs 2.1 and 3.1, and the outcomes of the survey circulated by the Secretariat via SL 040/21, and to include the outcomes of the evaluation in the ICAO APAC Annual Safety Report 2021.

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