



International Civil Aviation Organization

**The Third Meeting of the APANPIRG ATM Sub-Group
(ATM /SG/3)**

Bangkok, Thailand, 03-07 August 2015

Agenda Item 6: AOP, MET, AIM, SAR

VOLCANIC EVENTS – THE NEED FOR A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

(Presented by IATA)

SUMMARY

This paper discusses the importance of timely and, equally importantly, ongoing information sharing during a volcanic event.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 As Asia Pacific contains the so called ‘Ring of Fire’, we can, and should, expect regular volcanic events in our region. Therefore planning for these events is essential.

1.2 Following an eruption, the first information received by operators is usually a NOTAM issued by the State. That NOTAM typically indicates that an eruption is in progress and sometimes includes actions (such as aerodrome closures) taken by the State to ensure safety of operations. Frequently, that is the only communication operators will receive from the State until the NOTAM is cancelled.

1.3 Obviously an ash plume can have a significant effect on aviation operations and the safety of flight, as well as an extensive economic impact on the travelling public, due to flight disruptions.

1.4 Following the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull (E2), which closed European airspace and consequently caused huge world-wide economic damage, ICAO DOC 9974 (*Information for Regulators and operators on operations in airspace potentially contaminate by volcanic ash*) was developed. The intent of these provisions was to provide a framework for the continued safe operation of international civil aviation during volcanic events. Notably, DOC9974 includes the following provision:

...an operator should not be prevented from operating through, under or over airspace forecast to be affected by a VAA, VAG or SIGMET provided it has demonstrated in its SMS the capability to do so safely.

1.5 From an airspace perspective, this clearly leaves the decision, as to whether to operate or not, in the hands of the operator.

1.6 From the perspective of aerodrome operations, DOC9974 contains the following:

a) The operator is responsible for the safety of its operations.

*b) In order to decide whether or not to operate into airspace forecast to be, **or aerodromes** known to be, contaminated with volcanic ash, the operator should have in place an identifiable safety risk assessment within its SMS.*

1.7 However, Doc 9691(*Hazards of operating in airspace and aerodromes contaminated by VA*) contains the following, somewhat contradictory, statement:

A decision has to be taken by the airport authority regarding the feasibility or necessity to continue aircraft operations at the airport.

1.8 Recent events, relating to an eruption in Indonesia, have highlighted the discrepancy between these two Documents and additionally, once again, demonstrated the lack of a collaborative approach amongst all stakeholders in ensuring critical information is available to all parties in a timely manner.

2. DISCUSSION

Collaborative Information Sharing

2.1 For operators the key to managing the impact of volcanic events is the sharing of timely and accurate information to assist in their decision making processes. However, typically, the aviation industry is not involved or included in the decision making process, with particular reference to the closure of aerodromes. *Note: it is recognized that on some occasions the need for speedy decisions would make this impractical.*

2.2 It is this general lack of co-ordination, and in particular ongoing information sharing during an event, that this paper would like to highlight.

2.3 Given the significant disruptive and economic potential of an aerodrome closure, the State concerned should take a proactive approach to collaboratively work with stakeholders (including other States) in ensuring information is shared regularly.

2.4 In the case of an aerodrome closure, the authority responsible for the aerodrome must take a proactive approach to ensure all parties are aware of risk management processes and decisions based on the same, changing circumstances and regular updates, even if its “no Change”.

2.5 In the recent Indonesian example, the decision to close a key airport was promulgated by NOTAM and this came as a surprise to all concerned, even local airline staff at that airport. From there no further information was provided to airlines and this led to uncertainty, no ability to plan recovery operations or keep thousands of stranded passengers informed.

2.6 It is proposed that States with potential or regular volcanic activity urgently implement a communications mechanism that will provide regular and timely information sharing occurs before, during and after an event.

2.7 The mechanism could take the form of:

- Daily conference calls between stakeholders and/or
- Daily information bulletins from the local authority and/or
- Formal event management teams at affected locations

2.8 Further, States should consider implementation of an internal crisis management centre including as minimum their MET offices (including those involved in VAAC reports review), ATC, and AIS to support the collaborative sharing of information.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper; and
- b) Through an ATM SG Conclusion urge States:
 - i) Establish a mechanism to provide regular and timely communications during a volcanic event to ensure all stakeholders are up to date with current information, planning and situation reports.
 - ii) Consider an internal crisis management centre to support the collaborative sharing of information during volcanic events or other crises
- c) urge participation in the upcoming APAC VOLEX

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