



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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AVIATION 168

INFORMATION NOTE

From: European Commission

To: Council

Subject: EU volcanic ash crisis: follow-up and the wider scope of crisis management
- Information from the Commission

Delegations will find annexed an information note from the Commission on the above mentioned subject, which will be dealt with under "Any Other Business" at the meeting of the Council (**Transport**, Telecommunications and Energy) on 16 June 2011.

Information note from the European Commission**Volcanic Ash Crisis follow-up and the wider scope of crisis management****1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** An Information Note was presented to the Council at March 2011 session outlining the developments that had taken place during the course of the last year since the Eyjafjallajokull volcanic eruption in April/May 2010 with regards to enhancing Europe's level preparedness to face such crisis situations. The Commission highlighted the fact that a volcanic eruption exercise (VOLCEX 01/11) would take place on 13/14 April for the purpose of testing and verifying the effectiveness of the various procedures and tools developed during the past year. The Commission noted its intent to closely monitor this exercise and the results thereof to determine possible further actions that might need to be taken in order to progress towards the end objective of having a harmonized approach by all concerned to such events.
- 1.2** The unpredictable nature of such events would have it that a month after the exercise Europe had to face the reality of the scenario that was used for the exercise. On Saturday 21 May the Icelandic volcano Grimsvötn erupted, with the intensity of the eruption estimated at 100 times that of the 2010 Eyjafjalljokull eruption. The immediate impact was the closure of all Icelandic airports and its airspace. The associated volcanic ash cloud did not reach European airspace (Ireland, Scotland & Northern UK) until Monday afternoon, with further progress during the Tuesday and Wednesday into BE, NL, DE, DK, NO & SE airspace.
- 1.3** The circumstances surrounding this eruption, however, were different – a different volcano, a different type of ash, different weather conditions, and most importantly, a different European response to the event.

2 LESSONS LEARNT

- 2.1** Volcanic ash still remains a real safety risk to aviation. With this in mind, bearing in mind states' responsibility for ensuring safety oversight, the final decision to open or close airspace when affected by volcanic ash contamination still remains with national authorities.
- 2.2** But one year on, lessons have been learnt whereby this safety responsibility can and should be dealt with through a joint approach for the benefit of the European region as a whole. It is clear, on the basis of the preliminary analysis and results from the VOLCEX 01/11, as well as the practical experience with the recent Grimsvötn volcano, that the application of the new European procedures, based on a Safety Risk Assessment approach, have worked effectively to minimise disruption. Whilst fully respecting the imperative of safety, Europe has demonstrated that it is now equipped to respond with a graduated response based on safety risk assessment rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, thereby ensuring the avoidance of a blanket closure of our airspace.
- 2.3** The preliminary results of the VOLCEX 01/11 indicate that by moving from the old to the new approach, an estimated 30% more flights would have been able to operate. A similar trend was observed by comparing the recent Grimsvötn experience with that of the Eyjafjallajökull event, which in effect saw a total of 900 flights cancelled as compared to 42.600¹.
- 2.4** It is a fact that such situations still constitute very challenging times for passengers and for the airlines. And whilst we must recognise that we cannot control every aspect of such situations, and remain dependent on the weather and the pattern of ash dispersion, it is however fair to say that the new European procedures have proved a very significant step forwards in terms of managing the associated risk and minimising disruption.

¹ Comparison between traffic cancellations between Eyjafjallajökull 15-17 April 2010 and Grimsvötn 23-25 May 2011

- 2.5** How have the new procedures worked? In practical terms, during the VOLCEX 01/11, as well as the Grimsvötn crisis, the European Aviation Crisis Coordinatin Cell (EACCC) was activated for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the collaborative decision making process through which clear advice was agreed and given as to how the response to these events should be. It is worth noting that in anticipation of the VOLCEX 01/11 the EACCC had formulated specific recommendations in this regard, which had been submitted to the Commission and Eurocontrol for advice, and that these recommendations are at the base of the positive outcome of both these events
- 2.6** In essence the EACCC recommendations are clear in proposing that
- States should not prohibit flight in airspace on the basis of ash contamination, and should only declare Danger Areas where potential threats are identified, supplemented by harmonised, specified conditions of entry.
 - These conditions of entry should be based on a commonly agreed Safety Risk Assessment approach and Risk Assessment Methodology²
- 2.7** The application of these recommendations during the VOLCEX 01/11, as well as during the Grimsvötn crisis, have allowed states and airlines to more precisely define the safety risk of flights, thereby minimising airspace closures.

3 FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

- 3.1** Whilst acknowledging the positive outcome from these events, it is too early to claim victory. Europe has made significant steps in ensuring a better level of preparedness for managing and responding to such disruptive situations, but as we look back at these events we also need to acknowledge that there is still room for further improvement.
- 3.2** The preliminary results of the VOLCEX 01/11, which in effect could be extended to the recent Grimsvötn eruption, were presented this Monday 6 June. Whereas support from the Member States for the new Safety Risk Assessment approach has been strongly supported, there remains work to be done to ensure a fully harmonised application. Based on the analysis results, there are 3 areas that deserve specific attention:

² Based on the revised ICAO Volcanic Ash Contingency Plan (EUR Doc 019) and the associated guidance material on the 'Management of Flight Operations with Known or Forecast Volcanic Cloud Contamination', the latter currently the subject of an EASA Advanced Notice of Proposed Amendment process.

- The need to complete the current EASA process of elaborating guidance material for operational risk assessment, to be supplemented by the definition and standardization of airworthiness data provided by engine manufacturers to such assessments.
- The organization of associated workshops and training to enhance stakeholder capability in applying the safety risk assessment methodology, and in this regard EASA will be taking the lead.
- The need to further improve on the process of determining the location and dispersion of volcanic ash, and the initiative has already been taken with the EACCC.

3.3 As was already indicated in March, the Commission recognizes the importance of establishing improved data on ash tolerance limits for operations in airspace with volcanic ash contaminants, but it equally recognizes the complexity of the technical issues to be addressed in this regard. EASA remains committed to pursuing the subject of engine acceptability levels for volcanic ash through its rulemaking activities, but greater emphasis in the short-term is put on the follow-up to activities identified above.

3.4 Europe urgently needs a mobility plan in case of disruptive events to build greater resilience into the European transport system. The Commission already addressed Member States in December 2010 and re-iterates its request for urgent transmission of national plans.
