



Contingency Planning

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Contingency Planning

Problems come in many forms, they're often unpredictable and although all aerodromes should have contingency plans which they practice regularly, they're not always the easiest thing to use from a practical standpoint as it can be difficult to search through a massive document looking for what you need. This small pamphlet is an aide-memoire as a sort of back-up to your main plan. I hope this guidance document fills that hole, which is available on our website. This is not a document for first-responders. The saving of life is always the first priority – this covers the 'what happens next' aspects and ongoing support to any rescue or relief operation.

Natural Disasters

For most of you, natural disasters will involve a weather event of some sort – usually hurricanes, storm force winds, storm surges and flooding. If it's a major event, there will be Government, inter-agency and possibly international assistance but as service providers or regulators, you are likely to be at the forefront and very much the 'people on the ground' and the subject matter experts for your airport. It's impossible to provide advice on specific events as they are all so different so this is intended to be generic but we hope it's helpful.

Assuming that all your normal precautions have been taken in advance, here are some other items to consider.



Health and Safety

- Is it safe for your people to work?
- Have you re-located critical infrastructure to alternative locations (e.g. ATC, Ops, RFFS)?
- Consider damaged electrical cables, gas and water leaks and lighting failures.

Security

- Are the airport, ATS and key installations secure against unauthorised entry?
- Consider temporary control of entry/positive recognition procedures.

People

- Are your staff able to get to work? Consider fallen trees, floods, rock-falls?
- Do you have enough qualified people to do their job(s)?
- Consider ATS – sufficient ATCOs to cover the watch periods?
- RFFS – sufficient firefighters – Fire category?
- Can aircraft operators cope with a reduction in Category?

What are you being asked to do?

- If humanitarian aid flights need access to the airport, consider when these will arrive and plan rosters accordingly.
- Don't waste valuable resource by trying to remain open for too long or when no support services are needed.

External airport facilities

- Does the Airport lighting work? Does at least some of it work?
- Can you operate safely by issuing a NOTAM to advise of any deficiencies?
- Is the runway clear of FOD and debris?
- Do you have enough ramp space for large cargo aircraft and helicopters?
- Is there fuel available, can it be dispensed?



Being clear about exactly what you, your airport and your team, are being asked to do is critical as it will help you to concentrate your efforts on achieving that task and avoid wasting resources. There is little point in having all your assets ready and waiting if there is no planned flying, for example.

Humanitarian Aid

- If you're expecting some of these, you could have your work cut out.



Technical Issues – Aerodrome

Lighting

- Is at least some of the aerodrome lighting working? How much? Can you still operate at night or in poor weather?
- Standby power working? For how long? Do you have spare fuel for generators?
- Is there lighting on the ramp? Can you park and handle aircraft there? Consider handling cargo and humanitarian aid.



Handling

- Aircraft handling, loading and refuelling equipment available?
Sufficient people?
- Military aircraft and large helicopters.
Armed personnel.
- Passenger control, immigration and security.



Other events – Industrial Action

Main points:

- This is probably not something you can sort out alone.
- It is likely to involve senior management, finance, HR and possibly Government agencies.
- For ATC and airport staff – how many (if any) are taking action?
For how long?
What will be the impact?
- Tell your regulator as soon as you have the facts. They can often help.
- Try to avoid becoming embroiled in negotiations – it's a HR/senior management issue.



Other events – Shortage of Qualified Resources

It can be very difficult if a unit experiences an unexpected reduction in licensed ATCOs. This is often exacerbated by the length of time it takes to train a replacement controller to achieve validation standard, even if they have had previous experience. However, there are things you can do to mitigate the impact on airport operations:



1. Agree a reduction in Airport Opening Hours with your Airport Manager so that the airport closes earlier or opens later each day.
2. If possible, avoid making a commitment to provide an on-call service, except for genuine safety of life flights.
3. A recommendation is that the airport should close at midnight (at the latest) to ensure compliance with the FRMS requirements and provide some flexibility in shift patterns.
4. Watch out for night duties as they have severe rest period requirements.
5. Apply strict PPR at all times.
6. Restrict aircraft movements (per hour) to a maximum level that a single ATCO can handle for 4 hours without a break.
7. Consider longer shift periods. This is unlikely to be popular but increased shifts can still fit within the FRMS requirements and some flexibility from your colleagues may be essential.
8. Discuss a modification to the FRMS with your regulator. This will also require a Risk Assessment.
9. If you don't already have it, determine and publish reduced OJT hours for experienced ATCOs in your MATS/UTP.
10. Decide how long the changes/modifications might be needed for – it is likely to be for several months.
11. Decide how you will monitor the effectiveness of the changes as part of your Change Management process. How will you know if ATCOs are becoming fatigued? Some pre-printed forms that the ATCOs complete at the end of each shift to say how they felt is a good method but active supervision by management or senior ATCOs is always required.
12. Publish any changes by NOTAM if required.



Other events – Tower Evacuations*

Tower evacuations can have a very significant impact on your operation. You can't always plan for them – things like a fire for example. My suggestion is to have a plan in your manual which includes 2 different scenarios: a 'prepare to evacuate' (when you have more time) and an 'evacuate immediately'. In both cases, have a grab bag available with all the essential kit in it, spare radios, mobile phones, log books, manuals etc. so you can operate from somewhere else if you need to and practice the plan regularly.

(*for additional detail see the ATS Contingency Planning leaflet on the ASSI Safety Promotion webpage www.airsafety.aero/safety_promotion)

Other events – RPAS



- Great asset!
- RPAS – Airspace considerations
- Co-ordination versus de-confliction

Emergency response drones can also be used to deliver vital supplies in emergency situations. Drones can quickly and safely transport medical supplies, food and other essentials to areas that would otherwise be difficult to reach.



Drones, however, provide a much faster and more efficient way of responding to disasters.

The improved situational awareness which they provide can be used to quickly assess the situation, locate victims and even deliver supplies and aid. And of course, they are much cheaper than using helicopters and fixed wing aircraft.

There can be a problem with illegal drone flights in restricted areas (e.g. media outlets, private drones flying nearby during a rescue operation also using a drone). The general consensus is that most of these flights do not have a criminal nature. Rather, the participants agreed that many private pilots simply do not know (or ignore the fact) that they cannot fly everywhere, and that this phenomenon might become a bigger issue in the future.

If a major incident is near to an airport (possibly an aircraft crash) or involves multiple other air assets in response, you're going to have de-confliction issues. By their very nature, drones tend to fly close to the scene and low which is generally in the way of things like helicopters or fire-fighting aircraft. But you will want to have maximum assets on scene simultaneously if possible so early co-ordination of that volume of airspace is essential. It is unlikely to work every time and there will be occasions when a specific asset needs access but try to plan ahead if you can. If an incident is being managed from a Command Centre (we call it Gold or Silver Command) include the RPAS technical Subject Matter Experts (SME) in the team as they will be immediately available to assist.



Consider restricting the airspace surrounding any incident and publish the details by NOTAM. Other means of co-ordination can be by time slots or height separation but as drone technology improves, an increasing number of professional drone operators carry ADS-B so even those airports without radar should be able to track them and this applies to the other airspace users also.

Credits:

Adobe Stock.

Meteorological Photos – courtesy of Jo Aston.

For more information on other ASSI Safety Promotional Material please go to www.airsafety.aero/safety_promotion or scan the QR code below.

