

Atlantic Conference on EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL AND AVIATION



Siggi Stefniison (siggi@stefniison.com)

Aviation regulators set out new procedures for dealing with volcanic ash clouds at the international conference on the effects of the Eyjafjallajökull volcanic eruption organised by Iceland's Keilir Aviation Academy on September 15. The event brought together aviation regulators, airlines, meteorologists and volcanologists to review the response to the 2010 ash crisis and the current state of the art for managing future eruptions. As the President of Iceland Olafur Grimsson concluded, although activity has ceased in Eyjafjallajökull there will inevitably be further eruptions, possibly much bigger and longer than the event this spring. Stephen Perkins, ITF, reported on \$ 5 bn damage inflicted by the ash cloud in terms of lost GDP. A prolongation of the disruption might well have pushed some airlines already seriously compromised by the financial crisis into bankruptcy.

Eyjafjallajökull revealed the shortcomings in the safety regulations in place. The reference level of ash concentration in place for identifying hazardous ash clouds was too low for dealing with the contamination of a very large area of densely trafficked air-space with dispersed ash. Regulators and aero engine manufacturers worked fast to define a more precise level of tolerance to low level ash exposure, raising the limit tenfold. A week into the crisis this enabled the designated no fly zones to be reduced greatly and services to resume. Agreement on rules for flying around no fly zones in areas where ash is detectable appears close, with primary responsibility likely to reside with pilots and airlines. All of the world's regulators are cooperating in defining procedures that avoid excessive disruption, with no compromise on safety, and universal applicability.