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SPANISH AIRSPACE USE BY CIVIL AIRCRAFT FACING SITUATIONS OF CONTAMINATION BY VOLCANIC ASH

CANCEL AIC INT 09/15.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this AIC is to provide operators, owners and maintenance organisations with a new guidance on aircraft operations where volcanic ash contamination may be a hazard for flight operations.

2. KEY PRINCIPLES

- It is necessary to avoid unnecessary airspace closures and recognize operators' decisions based on their Volcanic Ash Safety Risk Assessment (VA SRA).
- Air operators shall develop a VA SRA:
 - a. For European operators; in accordance with the guidelines provided in GM2 ORO.GEN.200(a)(3) for aircraft operators and in accordance with GM3 ORA.GEN.200(a)(3) for ATOs, and it must be accepted by the respective competent authority.
 - b. For non-European operators, in accordance with ICAO Document 9974: 'Risk management of flight operations with known or forecast volcanic ash contamination'. It is not required to draft a separate SRA specifically for Europe.
- The operator is responsible for the safety of its operations under the oversight of its respective State regulatory authority. In order to consider 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 (SRA) within its Safety Management System (SMS). The guiding principle for such operations is the use of a safety risk management approach, as described in ICAO Doc 9974 and EASA Safety Information Bulletin (SIB) 2023-13 (19 December 2023).
- Avoid operation in visible volcanic ash or, where visibility of the ash is impaired (IMC, night), avoid operation in discernible volcanic ash;

- Air operators shall ensure that in case of volcanic ash encounter during a flight, the flight crew report it to the ATS Unit providing service in that airspace. This real-time information will facilitate providing operational feedback to the VAAC(s) and to Eurocontrol/NM.

The safety control measures set out in ICAO Doc 9974 and EASA Safety Information Bulletin (SIB) 2010-17R72023-13 (19 December 2023) are intended to be sufficiently robust that they facilitate acceptance, without further investigation, by a State whose airspace is forecast to be affected by volcanic ash.

3. TERMINOLOGY

The ash concentration charts provided by the London VAAC and Toulouse VAAC for operations in European airspace, identify the three areas as described in the ICAO Volcanic Ash Contingency Plan - EUR and NAT Regions (EUR Doc 019), namely:

- Area of Low Contamination (to be displayed in Cyan): an airspace of defined dimensions where volcanic ash may be encountered at concentrations greater than 0.2×10^{-3} gr/m³, but less than or equal to 2×10^{-3} gr/m³.
- Area of Medium Contamination (to be displayed in Grey): an airspace of defined dimensions where volcanic ash may be encountered at concentrations greater than 2×10^{-3} gr/m³, but less than 4×10^{-3} gr/m³.
- Area of High Contamination (to be displayed in Red): an airspace of defined dimensions where volcanic ash may be encountered at concentrations equal to or greater than 4×10^{-3} gr/m³.

4. APPLICATION OF SRA IN SPAIN

4.1 Areas of ash contamination

Spain will not close airspace forecasted to contain ash contamination in the short term, except in the vicinity of a volcano where ash and volcanic gases pose a direct threat to flight safety.

In Spain, aircraft operators will be allowed to make decisions based on their SRA, as agreed in advance with their respective State regulatory authority, in the forecast areas of low, medium and high ash contamination.

4.2 Common SRA recognition

As part of its overall decision-making process regarding the operation of aircraft in airspace forecast to be, or aerodromes known to be, contaminated with volcanic ash, Spain will allow aircraft operators registered in other States to base their decisions on their SRA, as agreed with their State competent authority, in accordance with the above mentioned approach (see 4.1) to decision making in Spain.

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