



Information Article

The Airline Emergency Call / Contact / Information Centre - ECC



Relevance

Airline Crisis Response - re the Provision and Receipt of Crisis Related Information - via use of (an airline provided and / or externally contracted) **Telephone Emergency Call / Contact / Info Centre**

Note - this article is loosely based around a **real** airline's emergency call centre (ECC) operation (fictional airline 'ABCX Airways' used herein to represent this real airline). This 'real' ECC is sophisticated, capable, uses advanced technology, has sufficient resources (particularly manpower and budget) and is fully supported by the airline's top management

The above model has been chosen to demonstrate what airlines might be looking for - as a typical benchmark in ECC ops, whilst acknowledging that **most** airlines will not reach such capability themselves - but can nevertheless use the model to assist them in choosing their own benchmark - whatever that might be

Remember - any ECC capability is typically better than none!

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AIRLINE EMERGENCY CALL CENTRE - ECC

Scenario

The following **aircraft accident scenario** has been used as a basis for this information article:

Airline:	ABCX Airways - International, scheduled passenger operations
Aircraft:	Airbus A380 with 550 passenger seating capacity
Flight No:	ABC 123
Crew:	Flight-deck =2; Cabin = 22
Passengers:	The aircraft is full (i.e. 574 total persons on board)
Route:	International from Middle East (DDD Airport) to UK (LLL Airport)
Codeshare:	WXYZ Airlines has 27 codeshare passengers on board flight ABC 123 - flying onward (2 hour connection at LLL) with WXYZ Airlines to ZZZ airport in USA
Codeshare Flight No:	WXYZ 123 - DDD to LLL (airline HQ / home base located ZZZ airport)
Accident:	Aircraft crashes on arrival (1200 UK time) at (on) destination airport LLL
Victims:	200 killed; 200 critical injured; 150 uninjured; 24 missing; 20 ground victims
Nationalities:	There are 37 different nationalities on board flight ABC 123
Call Centre 1:	ABCX Airways has its own emergency call centre (ECC) located at DDD . Estimated ECC opening (to take calls) is at 1300 UK time. Inbound call capability is up to around 100,000 / 24 hours
Call Centre 2:	WXYZ Airlines has its own ECC located at ZZZ and estimates opening it (to take calls) at 1330 UK time. Inbound call capability is up to around 50,000 / 24 hours
Call Centre 3:	The UK Police Force responsible for LLL has its own * Casualty Bureau - inbound call taking capacity is up to 95,000 / 24 hours . LLL Police estimates activating its casualty bureau at 1600 UK time
<p>* Note - a UK Police 'casualty bureau' may be approximately likened to an airline emergency call centre. However, its prime purpose is to collect, collate and co-ordinate information related to the 'Disaster Victim Identification - DVI' process, with particular emphasis on 'missing persons', supporting identification of 'deceased persons' operations and dealing with Families known to be associated with accident victims (whether the latter are deceased, injured, uninjured, missing or 'not known')</p> <p>The associated UK Police official documentation states that <i>'a casualty bureau has a specific role (not expanded upon further here) meaning that it should not typically be used as a "general public information" point of contact'</i></p>	
Media & similar:	FACEBOOK, TWITTER & similar are posting crash site images and comments by 1205 . News agencies transmitting crash site images and comments around the world by 1230 . First media personnel already at LLL airport





Agreement: ABCX Airways and WXYZ Airlines have signed an 'integrated emergency response / mutual aid' agreement specifying advisory protocols and processes to be followed when one or both airlines activate their ECCs in response to an accident concerning any flight, which is subject to a code-share agreement between the two airlines

Agreement: Neither airline has an agreement, memorandum of understanding or similar with the UK Police (e.g. as might be for use in the event that one or both airline ECCs and a UK Casualty Bureau operate concurrently - in the event of an aircraft accident involving either airline [and / or a code share partner] occurring in UK - or elsewhere where there might be a significant number of UK citizens involved)

Why have an ECC?

Taking the above scenario, it should be fairly obvious why an airline needs an ECC - but if not, here are a few of the **main** reasons (there are more):

1. **Humanitarian** - it is estimated that up to 100,000 people (possibly more) will want to be able to contact a dedicated airline emergency call / contact / info centre(s) in the first 24 hours post-accident, most of whom will have some reason (however valid / vague / irrational) to want to know (quickly and reliably) if a 'loved one etc.' was on board the accident aircraft. If such an ECC does **not** exist, there is absolutely no easy and rapid way for these questions (& others) to be asked of the airline - and for the latter to provide answer(s)

Thus (with no or inadequate ECC capability) the airline might be seen as failing in its duty of care to its customers & their families etc. with regard to adequate pre-crisis preparation

2. **Maintenance of 'Normal' Ops** - despite the accident, both airlines would typically be trying to maintain 'normal ops' over the rest of their networks

Without a dedicated airline ECC, the achievement of same would be potentially impossible, due to the disruption caused by tens of thousands of calls (from the public, media, authorities, other stakeholders etc.) coming in to just about every available airline telephone in existence (but particularly to the airlines' commercial call centres worldwide)

Similarly, large numbers of agitated and anxious persons might be turning up at both airlines' airport information / ticket / check-in desks, retail outlets, headquarters locations etc. - all over the world

Thus (with no or inadequate ECC capability) the airline might be seen as failing in its duty of 'appropriate responsibility and care' to its customers, staff and shareholders etc. with regard to adequate pre-crisis preparation





3. **'Survivability' of Airline** - for the reasons documented in 1 & 2 just above (and remember - there are more) - lack of an adequate airline ECC at time of major crisis (& the consequent, adverse implications) will be quickly picked up by the world media and invariably used 'in a negative way' against the accident airline(s). The subsequent adverse impacts on brand, image, reputation etc. can potentially be so severe that the viability of the airline(s) surviving the crisis, as an operating business, could realistically be called into question

Note - whilst the above may be seen as applying to large, international passenger airlines (as per the scenario), it also applies in principle to many other aircraft operators - charter; low cost, executive, cargo etc. For example, a cargo aircraft operator might ask how all of this is relevant to such an operation - as no passengers are carried? The simple answer is - what if the cargo aircraft (full of dangerous air cargo) crashes onto a high density residential area - killing hundreds on the ground and also causing an associated environmental catastrophe!

Note:

- It is believed that many airlines (2021) still have no ECC capability whatsoever
- Many passenger airlines which **do** have an ECC capability (either their own or one 'bought-in' off the shelf from a specialist, 3rd party commercial organisation) may (probably would) fall short in anticipated call taking capacity e.g. you anticipate up to 50,000 inbound calls on day 1 (first 24 hours) of the crisis (because of your type of operation) - but the expected call centre daily capacity is only around 30,000! (which is not untypical in reality for most 3rd party provided ECCs)

Planning Assumptions & Typical Requirements for a large Airline Emergency Call Centre Operation

- What has been documented further above is, in principle, a realistic planning scenario - based, where appropriate, on real (historical) precedent & extrapolation
- Historical precedent indicates that such an accident scenario could generate anywhere up to 100,000 **inbound** calls to an airline ECC(s) (depending on actual circumstances 'on the day') in the first 24 hours of the crisis
- Historical precedent indicates that inbound call traffic volume (to an ECC) falls sharply during the **second** 24 hours of ECC operation and, at the end of the **third** to **fourth** 24 hour periods post-accident, may be sufficiently low to significantly reduce the size of the ECC- or to even close it. (For the latter, inbound calls to the airline thereafter [re the emergency] being handled by more conventional means)
- With two **airline** ECCs operating concurrently (as per our scenario above) and considering the split of pure ABCX Airways passengers to WXYZ codeshare passengers at the time of the accident - by far the greater majority of calls to ECCs would go to the ABCX Airways ECC

However you look at the above scenario, the airlines involved are faced with an extremely formidable task. In the interests of clarity when exploring this further, a '**simplification**' will be **temporarily** introduced here - and then corrected and accounted for later in this article (i.e. from page 9 onwards for the latter)

The 'temporary' simplification is to assume that Flight ABC 123 is **NOT** code-sharing between DDD & LLL - meaning that the ABCX Airways ECC operation from DDD to LLL is the only one we need to consider **for now**





Firstly, let's take a very simplistic look at what is (would have been) typically involved in the design, development, set-up and operation of the **ABCX Airways** ECC - with a required (predicted) **inbound** call capacity of 100,000 per 24 hours:

- **Top level management approval** - this is needed as the ECC is likely to use (temporarily 'borrow') **normal** business (commercial) 'call / contact / information centre' facilities & associated staff e.g. by using (part or all of) one or more of the airline's reservations / customer contact centre(s) (assuming that it has more than one); e.g. by using part or all of the airline's separate contact centre(s) for frequent flyer (loyalty scheme) customers etc.

As some large, international airlines might have up to 5 (possibly more) reservations / customer / frequent flyer contact centres located around the world - the decision to use one or possibly two for such ECC ops (for a temporary and relatively short period) is typically feasible operationally - with any normal business call load being diverted to the remaining (unaffected) call centres

However, due the adverse commercial impacts associated with the above (even if for just 3 to 4 days) - an ECC project such as the one described cannot move forward without initial and on-going approval and support (and budget) from those at the very top of the airline

- The ABCX Airways '**inbound / receiving call**' ECC uses 300 workstations, 'borrowed' at time of crisis from **part** of the airline's main commercial (reservations) call / contact centre at airline HQ in DDD - and also from **part** of the separate loyalty (frequent flyer) call / contact centre - also located in DDD. A separate 'overseas located' ABCX Airways call / contact centre provides an additional 50 inbound workstations for overflow ops. Combined **inbound** call capacity of all of the above is expected to be in excess of 100,000 calls per 24 hours

A **separate** and **dedicated** (built for purpose) 100 workstation '**outbound / sending call**' ECC is also operated from ABCX Airways HQ at time of crisis

All inbound and the outbound elements of the ECC effectively 'communicate with each other for the purpose of managing the task' - via the sophisticated and dedicated software system mentioned a little further below

- Co-opting and then training **existing** reservations / customer contact centre staff (and similar) to operate the ECC is a start - but will not provide sufficient total manpower resources for 24 hour ECC operations whilst concurrently trying to maintain normal business

Accordingly ABCX Airways **has recruited and trained a further 1200 + of its staff** (volunteers from all disciplines, trades, professions etc.) to additionally man & operate the ECC specifically. Volunteers and existing call centre personnel all receive ECC specific initial and recurrent training - and participate in associated exercises

- **Sophisticated and dedicated ECC software** (including telephony software) has been developed and implemented 'in-house' (by ABCX Airways) for the ECC operation

This software integrates (i.e. is actually part of) with the overall software system used to run the **entire** ABCX Airways crisis response operation i.e. integrates with the command & control module; integrates with the humanitarian assistance module etc.





In-house design & development of such a system is a lengthy, work intensive and costly process - but what you get is 'bespoke' i.e. customised exactly to the airline's requirements (if the job is done properly)

Alternatively, procurement of 'off the shelf' ECC software is possible - and will generally also be expensive in the longer term (it is effectively being rented / leased) - and no matter how it has been designed and developed, can never come close to matching the compatibility, effectiveness & efficiency of a bespoke system

- ABCX Airways has outsourced an operationally capable and adequately resourced international telecommunications entity to provide, operate and maintain (on behalf of the airline) a **'toll-free' telephone number system** for use when calling the airline's activated ECC from a large number of different countries - including those where an airline provided toll-free facility is required for use in any particular country by law (e.g. as in the USA)
- To facilitate translation / interpretation duties at the ECC - ABCX Airways uses the resources of its cabin crew department (25, 000+ cabin crew from 130+ countries - collectively speaking more than 50 languages). The airline additionally retains the services of an outsourced translation / interpretation private (commercial) entity, to provide rapid translation of languages not provided for by the cabin crew 'facility'

The ABCX Airways ECC in Operation

The following provides a very simplified and abridged overview of potentially realistic ABCX Airways ECC ops - as related to the scenario and other information already provided above:

Note - the following refers to ECC operations only and **not** the overall airline crisis response

- At 1205 UK time (1505 DDD time on a **normal working day** for the airline) the ABCX Airways HQ Operations Control Centre declares the accident as 'catastrophic' and initiates the airline's automated crisis alerting & activation system - including ECC alerting & activation
- By 1220 UK time the **exact** number of staff required to man the first 12 hour ECC shift (around 500 persons) have been alerted and are activating (remember - in this scenario the alert goes out [is transmitted] during normal working hours)

Note - the ABCX Alerting & Activation system is capable of alerting large numbers of contacts in just a few minutes. It can also be programmed to stop alerting once sufficient operators for the first ECC shift have 'acknowledged' the alert and confirmed their immediate availability for ECC duty (they [potential ECC operators & other staff] typically do this by use of a telephone touch tone key pad response to the alert - e.g. 'press 1 if you are immediately activating for crisis duties')

- The ECC's software operating system is integrated with:
 - the airline's departure control ICT system (DCS)
 - the airline's reservations ICT system (CRS/ GDS)
 - the airline's loyalty (frequent flyer) ICT system





- the airline's operations control ICT system
- the airline's APP / API / APIS ICT security system
- the airline's overarching crisis management ICT system

This means that at the 'push of a button' the ECC has available to it (in a pre-designated, defined and fully co-ordinated manner) all of the appropriate information from the above 'internal' sources - as is required (by the ECC) to conduct a significant portion of its ops

For example the full (unverified) passenger manifest, crew list, details of codeshare passengers, boarding sequence, seating assignments etc. - will have typically been auto-loaded onto each ECC workstation's PC *before* operators even start arriving at the ECC facility

*Note - the scope of this info article does not permit a full explanation of the above. However, as a further example of what the ECC software system is capable of - both downloads from the loyalty and security systems provide 'families, relatives and friends' contact details as associated with many passengers on the accident flight. This creates the possibility of the ECC pro-actively notifying and updating crisis related information to such contacts - even *before* they might otherwise become aware of the accident from other (non-airline) sources - such as the media*

*Another point here is that what has been described above is also available to airline's not having a sophisticated ECC management software system e.g. (and assuming that such information is available) it can be downloaded, transferred and managed *manually* - although this will be a work intensive and very time consuming process*

- By 1250 UK time enough staff are present at the ECC to declare its intent to be partially (75%) operational by 1300
- At 1300 UK time the airline's corporate communications department is instructed to promulgate (distribute) via all forms of media - the toll-free (within the UK and the Middle East country where DDD is based) and toll-paid (works from anywhere in the world) telephone numbers for the activated ABCX Airways ECC

The same information is immediately promulgated on all appropriate airline websites & social communications networks (FACEBOOK; TWITTER etc.)

- First 'public' calls start coming in to the ABCX Airways ECC at 1310 UK time
- By 1330 UK time the ECC is 100% manned and is declared fully operational
- At 1335 UK time the passenger manifest for the accident flight is 'verified / confirmed' by the ABCX Airways DDD station manager. At the 'push of a button' the ECC Manager invokes a 'forced' pop-up message on every ECC PC screen - thus displaying this vital information to all ECC operators

*Note - depending on whether or not the accident flight's passenger manifest has been verified - depends on what inbound ECC operators might say to inbound callers genuinely believed to have 'loved ones' on board the accident flight - e.g. *before* verification the message typically might have been something like '.....I can confirm that the name of the person you are calling about appears on the passenger list for flight ABC 123.....'*





Once the manifest is verified this message would typically have **changed** to '.....*To the best of our belief the person you are enquiring about was on board flight ABC 123.....*'

The ability to instantly force pop-up messages to all ECC workstations simultaneously (e.g. '.....*the PAX manifest has now been verified.....*') provides desired flexibility to operators to change the messages they are providing - even whilst in mid telephone conversation with a caller

- When the ECC first opens to callers (and possibly for some considerable time afterwards) the status (e.g. dead, injured, uninjured, missing, not known) of all persons on board flight ABC 123 will generally be unavailable. During this period the **inbound** call ECC will take and record appropriate information from callers believed to be 'genuine' - and **promise** to call them back when further information becomes available

As updates on status start to come in (e.g. from ABCX Airways LLL Station [Airport] Manager) to the ECC, the information is entered (by inbound and / or data entry ECC operators) into the appropriate 'accident victim' records on the ECC software. Such entry **immediately** and **automatically** triggers associated outbound or return calls at the ECC's (separate) **outbound** call centre - thus fulfilling the 'promise' made earlier

With time the **inbound** call operation will normally decrease as the **outbound** operation increases. Manpower shortage to the outbound call centre is not a problem as excess inbound call operators are 'virtually' reassigned to the outbound call role (all ECC personnel being multi-skilled in all appropriate ECC tasks e.g. inbound, data entry, outbound etc.)

Note - the ECC will typically provide (by telephone) accident victim **status** and other appropriate information to associated family, relatives and friends, as soon as possible after the information becomes known at the ECC. However, special considerations apply where the status is 'deceased' or otherwise 'sensitive' - and such status is typically (**but not exclusively**) **NOT** made by telephone nor (in general) by airline staff. Data protection considerations (if any) might also be significant factors here

- Given the accident scenario used above, an important task for the ECC will be to liaise with 'family, relatives and friends' to arrange for the provision of 'ante-mortem (before death)' type information, typically used by the 'authorities' to (try to) officially confirm the identification of the deceased - e.g. via dental records, fingerprints, DNA, recent photographs, general description, tattoos / scars / markings, medical records, description of clothes / jewellery worn etc. (Note - in UK this task will generally be carried out by the UK Police 'Casualty Bureau'. In most other countries [particularly in 'developing' and 'least developed' countries] the airline ECC can expect to be heavily involved in this role)

Where possible and practicable the airline's Humanitarian Assistance Team (HAT) can deploy to assist families, relatives and friends 'face to face' in this process. The HAT will also generally deploy to the accident location itself, in support of surviving accident victims and any family, relatives and friends who might also be there / near there (however they happened to be there)

Needless to say - the ECC and the HAT co-ordinate with each other, in order to manage these tasks effectively and efficiently - via the ECC and HAT specific modules of the airline's overall crisis management software system





- With time, a point will come in the ECC operation where it might be appropriate to ask involved family, relatives and friends if ABCX Airways can transport them to (or as near as practicable to) the accident location, in order to be with their loved ones (regardless of the latter's status)

The associated decisions and information are entered into the ECC software and then shared with the organisation engaged by the airline to arrange all aspects of such travel (possibly done by the airline itself [via Staff Travel; VISA Services etc.] - and / or possibly outsourced to a pre-arranged specialist [commercial] 3rd party entity). Whoever arranges the travel, the telephone **contact** with those travelling may still be generally conducted by ECC staff - at least in the shorter term

- From precedent it is anticipated that by day 2 of the crisis the ECC operation (except for travel requirements) will be mainly **outbound** - and that by day 3 to 4 of the operation the total call workload will be such that the ECC can be reduced in size to a much smaller inbound / outbound facility - typically 20 to 30 workstations or possibly significantly less, depending on circumstances 'on the day'

Over the following days the size of the ECC is expected to reduce still further (except for travel requirements) until a point in time will come when the ECC can be disbanded completely - and the communications role assumed by a small cell of ECC trained staff operating from the airline's **normal** business call / contact / information centre - or some such, similar solution

WXYZ Airlines and the UK Police Casualty Bureau

At this point we will now **re-introduce** code-share partner WXYZ Airlines and the UK Police Casualty Bureau into the scenario (as per the boxed note at bottom of page 4)

WXYZ Airlines

In an ideal situation (and for a number of very valid reasons) only **one** ECC should be in operation at any one time - and as ABCX Airways is the operating carrier and the vast majority of passengers on flight ABC 123 are ABCX Airways customers - this 'one and only' ECC should logically be operated by ABCX Airways

However, in reality WXYZ Airlines **will** also open up its own ECC (just try to stop them!) - not only for the sake of its own 27 codeshare passengers on board ABCX Airways flight ABC 123 - together with their families, relatives and friends worldwide - but also for the many thousands of other concerned people who might have some reason for wanting to check that a loved one was not on board a declared WXYZ Airlines accident flight - code-shared or otherwise

With two separate (airline) ECCs now operating concurrently (in different countries) for the same crisis, the potential for absolute confusion amongst / between the two airlines, and also for those wishing to obtain information re the accident (particularly associated family, relatives & friends), is very high





However, our scenario assumes that both airlines had previously entered into a mutual emergency support agreement (at the same time as making their codeshare agreement) to cover exactly such circumstances - with the agreement stipulating e.g. who exactly would be responsible for what - including * designation of the 'lead' ECC; * which (sectors of the public) would be advised to call which ECC (e.g. all in N America to call the WXYZ Airlines ECC - with the rest of the world calling the ABCX Airways ECC); * how would data be exchanged between the two ECCs; * who would arrange travel for families etc. to the accident location; * agreement on deployment of humanitarian assistance teams; * agreement on dealing with the media etc.

This joint / integrated plan should have been regularly trained and exercised **individually** by each airline following the codeshare agreement - and **jointly** exercised (involving both airlines) on several occasions during that same period

UK Police Casualty Bureau

Some points to note re UK (Police) Casualty Bureau operations:

- A UK police casualty bureau (CB) can be likened to an airline ECC - **with the exception of a different focus on function**
- The primary function of a CB is to support any '**disaster victim identification**' (DVI) operation - generally as associated with a mass fatality incident occurring in UK (or elsewhere where there is a significant UK interest e.g. the December 2004 Tsunami disaster)
- The primary function of a DVI operation is to **identify the deceased and to account for the 'missing'**
- Accordingly (& very simplistically) a UK police CB contains (amongst other integral parts with different responsibilities) an **inbound call centre** for **public** use - as part of the overall information gathering process associated with identification of the deceased and reconciling 'missing persons'. The CB also contains an **outbound / return** call element
- There is a UK legal requirement for a CB to activate where circumstances so require
- In extremis - a UK police CB is capable of taking around 95,000 calls per 24 hours
- The 'general public' worldwide (and also many airlines - including those operating to / from UK) **are typically unfamiliar with the CB function as described above** - e.g. perhaps regarding it as '**just another ECC**' with the same types of functions as airline ECCs (which is a big mistake!)

Whatever the function of the CB, it is (in our scenario) yet another (number 3) concurrently operating ECC, dealing with the telephoned enquiry workload associated with accident flight ABC 123

As no **productive** liaison has ever been effectively undertaken **IN REALITY** (i.e. outside of the scenario used in this info article) between airlines (operating to / from UK) and the UK police CB - as to 'who does what'; 'how is commonly required data exchanged'? etc. - there are potentially grave risks here associated with concurrent airline ECC and UK police CB operations in general, as associated with scenarios such as the one used in **this** information article





Note 1 - an organisation known as the 'UK Aviation Emergency Planning Group' (UK AEPG) has worked in the past with both the UK Police and the UK government's Foreign & Commonwealth (External Affairs) Office (FCO) on producing jointly agreed protocols for addressing integrated ECC operations (including UK Police Casualty Bureau operations) - as associated with scenarios such as the one used in this information article

Subsequently, a memorandum of understanding was produced around 2007 for signature (ratification) by all three parties involved i.e. Police, FCO and UK AEPG (latter representing most UK airlines and some overseas airlines also - operating to / from UK). **Unfortunately this memorandum of understanding has never been ratified** (and still hasn't / probably never will) as at 2021

Whilst a UK Police casualty bureau type facility is beneficial (one could almost say 'essential') to DVI operations - such facility (or equivalents) are very rare in much of the world - & thus (obviously) cannot impact on most airline ECC operations - for better or worse. However, in the very small number of countries where CBs (& similar) **are** in operation - they **must** be adequately accounted for in any airline's (operating into and out of such countries) emergency response plan

Also see 'Note 4' further below for more on this subject

(Point of Interest - Note that Ireland, the UAE [and possibly Oman] also operates a DVI / Casualty Bureau operation - based on that of the UK)

Note 2 - for more information on DVI operations in general - see *separate information article* in this series by AERPS - entitled '**DVI Operations**'. You will find the DVI article at:

<https://www.aviationemergencyresponseplan.com/information/>

(Scroll down the list of information articles shown until you reach the one required [entitled 'DVI'])

Note 3 - many airlines use 3rd party (outsourced), commercial organisations to run an ECC on their behalf at time of crisis e.g. such organisations include British Airways, Emirates (airline), Aviem, Blake, FEI, Kenyon etc.

The information provided in this information article applies equally to such 3rd party entities in principal. However, there is now an added dimension to be accounted for here - and that is that the ECC 'buck' will still eventually stop with the airline. Accordingly, **strategic** (airline) control of all such outsourced ECC operations should be planned for, established, trained for and exercised - by all airlines concerned

Note 4 - two (2) protocols currently exist for the basic documenting of the 'liaison / co-ordination / information exchange' requirements referred to above with respect to the **UK's** 'casualty bureau' operations

The first (dated 2007 and already mentioned in Note 1 above) is between UK airlines (together with a small number of foreign airlines [**including the real equivalent of 'ABCX Airways'**]), the UK Police and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO). As mentioned above, this MOU has, unfortunately, never been ratified - but might nevertheless still be found useful to all concerned. It can be found in full - starting on the *next page*

The second (2011) is similar but concerns a (UK based) 3rd party specialist, commercial provider of emergency services (including Emergency Call Centre Services) to various clients - including airlines. (The provider is 'Blake Emergency Services' - and the associated MOU is between the latter and the UK Police) (MOU not provided herein)





MOU - UK Police / UK FCO / Airlines - Casualty Bureau + FCO & Airline ECCs (dated 2007 - *but never ratified*)





- Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- UK Airline Companies
- Consular Directorate - Foreign & Commonwealth Office

AIRLINE INCIDENTS

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS, THE FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE AND UK AIRLINE COMPANIES

INTRODUCTION

In July 2005, previously existing contractual arrangements between British Airways and contracted UK airlines, pertaining to BA's Emergency Procedures Information Centre (EPIC) ceased. The impact of this was to remove (from those previously contracted airlines) their recourse to BA's emergency call centre resources, with which to respond appropriately to the high volume of telephone enquires likely to be received following a mass fatality aircraft incident

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) outlines the agreed response to the handling of public telephone enquiries and the provision of assistance to casualties and their families following an aircraft incident occurring within the territorial waters of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The MoU is between the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), signatory UK airline companies and the (UK government's) Foreign & Commonwealth Office

This MoU also outlines the agreed response between ACPO, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and signatory airlines in the case of an overseas incident involving UK citizens and whereby the aircraft concerned is operated by a signatory airline company

This MoU cross-refers directly to the existing ACPO and FCO MoU on "International Incidents" agreed in September 2006

This MoU is not a legally enforceable document. Signatories to it, however, accept the principles and roles described within and commit themselves and their organisation, in the public interest, to shared efforts required to respond to an airline incident. Each organisation agrees to commit resources commensurate with its functions - together with general responsibilities within its own operational spheres and priorities





The airline emergency call centre referred to in this MoU can apply to an airline's own internal emergency call centre or to a (commercial) 3rd party ECC, activated on behalf of a customer airline

The United Kingdom Airlines Emergency Planning Group (UKAEPG) is a collective forum of the majority of UK airline companies' emergency planning personnel - and therefore provides a vehicle for deliberation and consultation with airlines on the matter of this MoU. Similarly, ACPO provides the centralised contact for Casualty Bureau for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.....and the Consular Crisis Group is the equivalent contact for FCO consultation

Names and contact details for representatives of each group are included at the end of this document (Appendix A). A membership list of the UKAEPG member airlines is also attached at Appendix B. *It is acceptable that certain foreign air carriers operating flights into and out of the UK on a regular basis may also become signatories to this MoU*

The overarching aim of this document is to facilitate a co-ordinated approach between police, airlines and the FCO - which makes it clear (to families, the media and the wider public) what the integrated response arrangements to an incident involving a **UK registered** aircraft (wherever its location) are, including call handling facilities available, their purpose and what callers should expect

The UK Police shall:

UK POLICE - NATIONAL

In the event of an airline incident within the territorial waters of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the host (police) force will geographically be that in which the incident has occurred. If the force requires national policing assistance the Gold (Strategic) Police Commander (Appendix C) will make the request through ACPO Police National Information Co-ordination Centre (PNICC)

UK POLICE ASSISTANCE - INTERNATIONAL

An international incident is likely to require a significant policing response which is likely to be beyond the capacity of any one, particular (UK) police force. The response to an incident outside of the waters of England, Wales and Northern Ireland will therefore be on a regional basis and will be based on the current PNICC on call rota

The lead UK police region will supply an Assistant Chief Constable / Commander (as Gold Commander), a Senior Identification Manager (SIM) and a Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) for the month they are on call - and thereafter for the duration of any incident. These officers will form the basic (top level) command structure. The FCO will reimburse police costs on the basis agreed with ACPO for police deployments

Depending upon the scale and / or type of incident, the FCO may request police assistance by making Casualty Bureau facilities available. This will be facilitated by the FCO communicating directly with the Lead Police Region and informing the ACPO President's Office, including out of hours

The ACPO President's Chief of Staff, or nominee, will make arrangements to facilitate the necessary support. Where appropriate, this may involve opening PNICC in order to mobilise and co-ordinate national (UK) resources





The President of ACPO retains the ability to nominate any (UK Police) force to take the lead in respect of a particular incident, if he/she decides that a specific force is better placed than the scheduled lead region to respond to the incident in question. For example, an incident in France affecting the English Channel might result in a South Coast force being asked to take the lead

Equally, the scale and nature of an incident might lend itself to a single large force with special skills taking the lead (e.g. Metropolitan Police Service [MPS], Police Service Northern Ireland [PSNI] etc.)

However, such nominations will be the exception and there is a clear expectation that the scheduled lead (Police) region will act on behalf of ACPO in support of the FCO

Where police service assistance to the FCO necessitates the deployment of police officers or police staff overseas - the Gold Commander (assisted, if required, by PNICC) will be responsible for obtaining the (UK government) Home Secretary's approval

POLICE CASUALTY BUREAU OPENED

Following an airline incident within the territorial waters of England, Wales and Northern Ireland the host force will activate its own Casualty Bureau and, if required, request appropriate assistance from ACPO / PNICC

In the case of an international incident the decision to open a police casualty bureau in support of the FCO and the UK airlines will be made by the police Gold Commander for the relevant lead force

When the incident requires an FCO response, the FCO will appoint a Crisis Liaison Manager (CLM) to work within the casualty bureau, who will also be a member of the Gold Group. In suspected terrorist incidents the National Co-ordinator Terrorist Investigations at New Scotland Yard must also be informed by the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism at the earliest notification of a suspected terrorist connection

In all serious UK airline incidents (particularly those involving fatalities) it is highly likely that the incidents will additionally be dealt with as a suspected terrorist incident until proven otherwise

In respect of a casualty bureau the police Gold Commander will:

- Where appropriate, appoint an SIO who will assume responsibility for conducting an investigation to establish criminal liability
- Where appropriate, appoint a SIM who will develop a strategy for the identification of deceased victims. This will involve appropriate use of Casualty Bureau, police Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) teams; liaison with the Coroner's Office and the implementation of a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) strategy, including the appointment of police Family Liaison Co-ordinators (FLC)





The SIM (in consultation with the police Gold Commander, the SIO and the accident airline) will establish arrangements to:

- Activate a Casualty Bureau public enquiry telephone call centre to receive public enquiries from those concerned about friends or family members who may be involved in the incident. If an incident occurs overseas, casualty bureau may be activated at the request of the FCO
- The accident airline will also be provided with details of the casualty bureau and the latter's nominated 'airline' liaison officer
- On behalf of the SIM and SIO - Casualty Bureau will formulate a comprehensive list of missing persons, known casualties and survivors - together with their condition and location
- The Casualty Bureau shall co-ordinate with the airline media team re the information to be released within press statements and press briefings

The SIM in consultation with the SIO will:

- Provide a nominated liaison officer to the airline emergency call centre and provide facilities for an airline representative to attend the casualty bureau location - all designed to assist the co-ordination and exchange of information, response activities etc.
- Facilitate the prompt notification (if / as known) to family members and other bone fide enquirers of the condition and location of those not involved.....and / or those involved but not seriously injured or deceased
- Without unnecessary delay, notify (to appropriate family members etc.) details of those who have sustained serious injury or are deceased
- Advise the airline of who has been notified (as per above) in order that travel and other airline assistance can be organised
- Ensure that all casualties and / or their families are advised by assigned FLOs of the assistance and services the 'involved' airline(s) can provide to them - and also inform the airline (via the Family Liaison Co-ordinator) of family etc. requirements in respect of travel, hotel accommodation, etc.
- Advise the airline of the name and contact details of the FLOs assigned to each casualty and / or family, in order that the FLO can be updated and supported by the airline
- Only withhold (from the airline[s]) any caller, next of kin and / or casualty information as known to the Casualty Bureau (and as potentially **not** received by the airline[s]) - in circumstances where the information is required to be restricted for reasons of national security or criminal investigation





AIRLINE RESPONSIBILITIES

In the event of an aircraft incident occurring within the territorial waters of England Wales and Northern Ireland, it is a police responsibility to collate and disseminate casualty information

The host / lead force for such an incident will typically be the 'geographical' force in which the incident has occurred. This force will provide the casualty bureau and will request further assistance through ACPO / PNICC if required

The FCO has a responsibility to provide assistance to affected UK citizens in the case of an aircraft incident occurring outside of UK

This MoU has been made in order to co-ordinate the resources, information and actions of these groups with the airline(s) involved and in the interests of enacting an integrated and efficient response that serves the needs of all responding agencies, accident casualties and / or their families

The (Accident / Incident) Airline shall:

- Immediately activate a free-phone (toll-free) public enquiry telephone call centre to receive calls from the general public who are concerned about friends or family members who may be involved in the incident
- Provide Casualty Bureau with all details relating to the incident including:
 - Date, time and location of the incident
 - Aircraft type and flight number
 - Routing, scheduled departure and arrival time
 - Code share information (if relevant)
 - Number of passengers and crew on board the aircraft
 - Ground casualties, survivors or potential witnesses to the incident
- In conjunction with airport authorities, seek to secure facilities at departure, arrival and connecting airports where family members may be gathering or travelling through - in order to protect their privacy and enable associated information updates to be provided
- Support any associated Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) process, repatriation of casualties and return of personal effects ops - and assist any associated airport authority to establish a repatriation area
- Provide suitably trained airline reps to attend the Casualty Bureau and, in the case of an incident outside the territorial waters of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the FCO
- Provide Casualty Bureau with preliminary passenger manifest information , followed by confirmed passenger manifest information and confirmed crew list information, at the earliest possible opportunity





- Publicise the agreed free-phone (toll-free) number(s) through appropriate media channels together with the redirection of potentially 'valid' callers who have called other airline numbers
- Attempt to distinguish those callers whose enquiries relate to individuals who are 'highly likely' or 'possibly' involved, from those who are not likely to be affected - and also gather callers contact information
- Redirect callers concerned about future travel reservations to the airline and / or tour operator's 'normal business' telephone call centre(s)
- In consultation with the press office of the host force or lead force and also in consultation with the FCO, redirect media enquiries to the airline media information line or press office (as available)
- Provide Casualty Bureau with caller and casualty information relating to all persons who may or may not be affected - as gathered by the airline call centre. Where possible this should indicate those 'highly likely' or 'possibly' involved, together with reasons. This information will be transmitted in the most efficient manner available to the Casualty Bureau e.g. via hard-copy format, electronic download, direct entry into the police Holmes 2 (computer system) via the 'CasWeb front end' interface etc.
- As details of casualties are obtained ensure Casualty Bureau is notified without delay
- Formulate a comprehensive and accurate list of casualties and where possible their condition, location and related caller information
- As information is confirmed, co-ordinate with the police Gold Commander to undertake the prompt notification to enquirers and family members of the condition and location of those not involved, or those involved but not deceased
- Where appropriate and agreed by the police Gold Commander (for incidents within the territorial waters of England Wales and Northern Ireland) co-ordinate with the SIM (or other, nominated Bronze [Operational] Police Commanders) to undertake the prompt notification to enquiries and family members of the condition and location of those not involved - or involved but not requiring hospital treatment
- Provide space within the airline accident control centre for representatives of the Casualty Bureau and / or FCO personnel as required
- At the time of notification or soon after and in consultation with Police Gold Commander, offer assistance services including practical assistance and emotional support to the 'casualty' and / or their family members
- Establish locally agreed plans providing an appropriate response to persons directly affected in consultation with statutory responders
- Where appropriate (and in consultation with the SIM) provide assistance that may be required by police FLOs with the collection of ante-mortem data, 'samples' from family members etc.
- Identify the legal next of kin (or equivalent person) for each deceased casualty to whom 'advance (immediate economic needs) payments' will be made, regardless of liability, in accordance with the Montreal Convention





- When appropriate and in consultation with police Gold Commander, provide resources to assist the DVI process, repatriation of casualties and return of personal effects to family members
- In consultation with the appropriate nominated police Bronze Commander(s), identify and provide travel arrangements for casualties and / or family members as required
- In consultation with the SIM, provide liaison with the FLOs to maintain contact with those family members who choose not to travel
- Provide to the nominated police Bronze Commander(s) and (if appropriate) the FCO, details of the airline's media team or press office resources available to respond to media enquiries
- Co-ordinate with the appropriate nominated police Bronze Commander(s) and the airline's media team or press office the information to be released within press statements and / or press briefings
- Provide a co-ordinated, continuous and appropriate update to the media as information becomes confirmed
- At an appropriate stage, consult with family members about an airline sponsored memorial service and monument

THE FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE (FCO) (External Affairs)

The FCO shall:

In the case of an airline incident outside of UK territorial waters the FCO will (as required):

- Activate the FCO public enquiry telephone centre in response to an aircraft incident overseas, through which to receive enquiries from the public concerned about friends or family members who may be involved in the incident
- Provide (to the airline and casualty bureau) information relating to those persons who are 'highly likely' or 'possibly' involved, gathered through the activated FCO enquiry line. Where established, this will be done in consultation with the appropriate police Bronze Commander
- As necessary, handover the handling of calls to the FCO enquiry line to Casualty Bureau, without changing the telephone number issued to the public
- Activate overseas embassy / consular officials and / or rapid deployment teams to support the assistance to casualties and/or their families involved at the overseas location
- Co-ordinate with the airline re the provision of services & assistance to casualties & their families
- Liaise with the airline and other responding agencies to co-ordinate DVI activities
- Provide an FCO liaison representative to casualty bureau and the accident airline's control centre - to assist with the co-ordination of information and response activity
- Co-ordinate with police Gold, ACPO Press Liaison Unit and the airline media team re the information to be released within press statements and press briefings





- Agree with police Gold the deactivation of the FCO telephone centre and the transfer of records
- Assist airline relations with responding overseas authorities, particularly in the case where passengers are non-UK citizens

VIENNA CONVENTION - DEATHS OF NON-BRITISH CITIZENS IN THE UK

Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (Article 37A), and equivalent provisions in bilateral Consular Conventions to which the UK is a party, there is a legal obligation as a 'Receiving State' to inform without delay the consular authorities of other signatory countries of the death of one of their nationals. The exceptions to this rule in the UK are nationals of Australia, Canada and New Zealand as, by mutual agreement, notification is not considered necessary (will be accomplished via other protocols)

The FCO encourages overseas governments to inform UK authorities of the death or serious injury of British nationals within 24 hours. The FCO would expect to extend a similar courtesy in respect of foreign nationals or Commonwealth citizens killed or seriously injured in the UK

The practice in the UK is for the police to ensure the next of kin are informed, and for police to encourage the next of kin to ensure (except as above) the appropriate consular officer in the Foreign or Commonwealth mission is notified of the death of one of their nationals, preferably within 24 hours

There is no obligation upon the next of kin to notify the death to a consular officer; nor is there any objection to a police officer notifying the consular officer if asked to do so by the next of kin. In the event that the next of kin specifically do not want the consular officer to be informed (perhaps because the deceased was a political refugee or a political asylum seeker) the wishes of the next of kin must be respected, but the police Press Office and the FCO Press Office should be briefed accordingly

In the event of a mass casualty incident in the UK involving death or injury to foreign nationals or Commonwealth citizens, the MPS (DPG) is responsible for informing foreign and Commonwealth missions in London if any of their nationals are known to have been affected

RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

In the event of any disputes as to the provisions of this MoU it will be the initial responsibility of local management or representatives to attempt to resolve the problem. If, however, the dispute cannot be resolved within 10 working days, it shall be referred to the signatories or their nominees to seek a solution





COMMENCEMENT

This MoU shall take effect upon signature by all parties until such time as it is terminated or superseded by a revised document. All parties may periodically review the effectiveness of the MoU following which it may be amended by written agreement between the parties. A party may only withdraw from the MoU by way of a written notification to the other parties providing appropriate notice of intention (60 days)

Signatories to this MoU are deemed to sign on behalf of their organisation and as such references to signatories relate to appropriate representatives of those organisations who are able to represent their interests for the purposes of this Memorandum

SIGNATORIES

.....
Signature & Date (ACPO Lead for International Affairs)

..... Airline signatory (each airline participating to sign)
Signature & Date plus name of airline

.....
Signature & Date (Director - Consular Directorate, Foreign and Commonwealth Office)





Appendix A

UK Police Command Structure

The Police in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will normally establish a three tier command structure in the response to a civil emergency (including airline incidents), as follows:

Gold (Strategic)

The Gold Commander will be responsible for developing a strategy in the response to an incident and chairing the multi-agency Gold co-ordinating group (also known as the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG))

Silver (Tactical)

The Silver Commander will report direct to Gold and be responsible for developing a tactical plan to implement Gold's strategy and co-ordinate the overall tactical response

Bronze(s) (Operational)

Bronze commanders will be appointed as necessary by Silver in order to implement a tactical plan. They will have either a geographic or functional responsibility and will report direct to Silver

Co-ordination Role

Within England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the accepted position is that the UK Police will generally co-ordinate the overall response to a civil emergency and Chair the SCG, unless the circumstances or type of emergency determine that is more appropriately carried out by another organisation. Chairmanship of the SCG will be determined by consensus within the Group itself





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Note

The **full** version (**parent** document) of this short information article (you are reading the latter now) can be found at:

<https://www.aviationemergencyresponseplan.com/guideline-template/>

When this webpage opens, scroll down (about half way down) until you find the '**ERP**' document entitled:

* CRPM Part 1 (ERP) / Volume 4 - **Emergency Call Centre Operations**

Click on the above to open and read the document

