

CHIRP Cabin Crew FEEDBACK

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COMMUNICATION AND TEAM WORKING

Failures in communication and the ability to work effectively as a team are popular themes in cabin crew reports. When working on board an aircraft, the cabin crew and flight crew need to be able to communicate with each other to ensure that flight safety standards are not compromised. Inadequate communications between crew members and airport personnel could lead to a loss of situational awareness, a breakdown in teamwork with wrong decisions being made, which could lead to an accident or an incident. Strong team communication can help build relationships and can benefit younger or less experience crew members.

We have included a selection of reports in Cabin Crew FEEDBACK that highlight the different failures in communication and why it is important to talk to your other crew members and flight crew. This also applies when communicating the problems and issues that crew members encounter when flying, to the company through its own reporting programme.

STORAGE OF HAND BAGGAGE IN NON-APPROVED STOWAGES

Report Text: This situation is not particular to one flight or one day as this has become a recurring problem over the last few weeks.

Since we have increased passenger capacity on our shorthaul aircraft, there has been a growing problem with hand baggage stowage during boarding. There have not been any changes in the hand baggage allowance but due to the extra seating, the crew are now having to find extra space for these bags when the locker availability has stayed the same as before. This causes not only stress to both passengers and crew but also means that sometimes bags have to be offloaded. On many occasions I have witnessed and experienced the SCCM and Captain seemingly bending over backwards to help by allowing other aircraft stowages to be used for stowing cabin bags. Recently, this included putting passenger bags in empty trolleys, in stowages with emergency equipment, in the flight deck and even in a forward toilet for take-off and landing! These bags then had to be kept in the galley during the flight so that the toilet could be used.

Lessons Learned: In my opinion these are inappropriate stowages for bags. The only way this can be improved is by putting tighter restrictions on passenger hand baggage limits. I don't think the company considered these consequences when they decided to put in extra seats.

CHIRP Comment: CHIRP regularly receives reports on the subject of cabin baggage and its stowage in non-approved stowages. In June 2011, the CAA issued Safety Notice SN 2011/05 which served as a reminder to all operators of the need to ensure that all cabin baggage is stored securely in a manner that it would not endanger aircraft safety.

No items of cabin baggage are permitted to be stowed in the aircraft toilets or on the flight deck. Similar restrictions apply to seats at the overwing and other emergency exits. All crew members should be vigilant to ensure that all passengers are aware of these restrictions and that baggage is stowed safely for the duration of the flight.

Crew members need to be pro-active during the boarding phase to ensure that all cabin baggage is stowed safely. If there are bags waiting to be stowed or there is no more room in the lockers to be able to stow them, the SCCM and the Captain should be made aware immediately so that the aircraft door is not closed and push-back is not commenced until it is all stowed safely or offloaded.

It is also important for the cabin crew members to submit company reports regarding cabin baggage issues after the flight to ensure that the company are made aware of any problems that have arisen. This way the company monitor the 'problem' routes and the numbers of reports submitted.

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The CHIRP Chief Executive has agreed to pass the topic of excess cabin baggage to the FOLG (Flight Ops Liaison Group) to be discussed at an upcoming meeting. The FOLG is comprised of members of the CAA and Flight Ops Directors from operators across the UK.

EVACUATION ALARM TESTING

Report Text: Before boarding, the evacuation alarms were tested but did not work 100% as it switched itself off. Engineering was called. It was tested again and found to not work. The alarm went off a couple more times during tests before boarding.

About 15 minutes after the passengers boarded, the evacuation alarm went off. Passengers reacted calmly as we were calm. Crew members did not take it seriously. After a little while, two more evacuation alarms came on. I was at a door alone and could not see anything outside and phoned the flight crew. Some other crew members did too but the phones did not work and no contact could be made. This happened a few times. This could have developed in a dangerous situation. It could have been a sign that there was something wrong as the evacuation alarm went off a few times shortly after one another.

The evacuation alarm should never be tested with passengers on board, especially when no PA is made before the test. Flight crew should have stopped this or informed us about more tests being carried out by engineering. It could have easily been misunderstood because there was NO communication at all, no PA, no phones and the crew members did not know anything about it. Passengers could have been hurt if a crew member did commence an evacuation on hearing the alarm.

Why were there Evac Alarms during passengers boarding? Why was no crew member informed by the flight crew or SCCM about the Evac alarm during passenger boarding. Why was there no feedback from the Captain? Every time it is tested there should be a PA.

Lessons Learned - Manuals should always be adhered to. What if the Evac alarm went off during the flight? Would this also be a test? How would we know?

CHIRP Comment: The company procedure for operating with an unserviceable evac alarm will be defined in the aircraft specific MEL, a copy of which will be available on the aircraft. If an alternative procedure has been adopted for the duration of the flight or a specific time period, all crew members should be notified beforehand so that they have the correct information and know what to do.

The main issue in this report is the lack of communication from the engineers to the flight crew and subsequently to the cabin crew. If there was no time for the SCCM to make a PA to the passengers to advise that the alarms were being tested, they could have told the crew this when they called them to advise that boarding had started. It is also worth noting that the PA may not have been functional when the evac alarms were being tested because the engineers would have changed the system to test mode. Crew members should be aware of the company procedures and know that the PA systems are not functional when in test mode.

DIFFERING OPINIONS REGARDING TRANSIT STOPS AND THE ABILITY TO REDUCE CREW COMPLEMENT

Report Text: When we reported for duty, one crew member advised us that they had already started their day with 2 previous sectors and were very close to going out of hours due to the delay we had just discovered on our flight. The crew member advised duty managers that they were close to going out of hours but were wrongly advised as to how many hours they could complete that day. At this point they were inside hours by 20 minutes. We eventually boarded and pushed back, only to be advised during taxi that there was a technical problem with the aircraft and that we needed to return to stand. This pushed the crew member out of hours and they then had to be offloaded.

Everyone agreed that the crew member had gone out of hours and the dispatcher took the crew member back to the crew room, we then said to the Captain that we needed a replacement crew member. The Captain said that we did not as we were not considered to be at base anymore. We were very obviously at base still, we hadn't even taken off. We advised that the aircraft required 4 crew members and showed them this information on our crew intranet. The Captain decided to explain their reasoning as when the aircraft does a 'days' work', it can potentially complete 8 sectors. From the time that it pushes back on sector one and leaves base, when it returns back to base it is only ever a transit stop. They then stated the known fact that if an aircraft is away from base and encounters unforeseen circumstances, then the crew complement can be reduced providing that the passenger numbers are reduced accordingly. The Captain believed this was considered as a transit stop which classified us as away from base so could we could therefore reduce the crew complement. All cabin crew disagreed entirely as we had just started our day and had only 3 of us turned up for the briefing we would have had to have been given a replacement. We contacted the union representative and management who completely agreed with us and advised us someone was on their way to join the crew and to advise the Captain of this. We did tell the Captain, to which he answered that if the tug arrived before the crew member did, we

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would be leaving without them! In the end, the Captain decided to wait for the replacement crew member. We had discussed how if we left with only 3 crew, an ASR would need to be filed. This would then have very clearly shown the situation and they would have had to answer as to why that happened.

I believe the Captain's explanation with regards to transit stops after the initial departure from base is true in regards to maintenance but not crew complement. I feel this eventually made them reconsider their actions.

Lessons Learned - That discussing everyone's concerns is very important, rank/seniority is not always correct in relation to knowledge of procedures. Be brave enough to challenge authority. Check with managers who will confirm either way and then stand your ground.

CHIRP Comment: Crew members can sometimes be scared to voice their concerns to the other crew members and the flight crew and this excellent report highlights why it is important for all crew members to communicate with each other before a final decision is made. The crew member was correct to inform the duty managers that they were close to going out of hours and it is unfortunate that the wrong advice was given.

CAA Comment: Due to unforeseen circumstances when away from a base of the operator, the minimum required cabin crew complement may be reduced in accordance with procedures established in the operations manual. If however during the subsequent series of flights the aircraft transits via a base of the operator, a replacement cabin crew member must be sourced to return the cabin crew complement to the minimum required for the aeroplane type.

APU FAILURE NOT COMMUNICATED TO CREW

Report Text: When we had landed back at base, we were told by the Captain that we had been flying with only 1 air-con pack. Just after take-off the other air-con packs failed. The Captain was told to continue flying back to base on 1 pack by the company. They were preparing for a decompression. We flew all the way back to base on 1 pack, the flight was full and nothing was said to the crew about the situation.

The Captain did however tell the SCCM when they phoned the flight deck on their hourly check. They were aware of the situation about two hours into flight. The SCCM decided to keep it to themselves and didn't inform any other crew members so when they went on their break no one was aware of the situation. When we confronted the SCCM after landing, they said they "forgot to tell us". Luckily nothing happened during the flight and we landed safely back at base.

Why weren't we told about the situation and made aware of the possible decompression and did the Captain make the right decision to continue on 1 air-con pack?

CHIRP Comment: There are two issues here – the understanding of the aircraft's ability to operate with one functioning air-conditioning pack and the lack of effective communication between the flight deck, SCCM and the cabin crew. All cabin crew should have been notified of the fault when it occurred so that in the event a decompression happened, they would be prepared for it. It is likely that the Captain was advised to return to base so that maintenance could be scheduled before it departed on another sector but again this information should have been passed to the crew. If any of the crew were unsure as to whether the aircraft could do this they could have asked the Captain why this decision was made. Miscommunication can lead to errors being made, which could then put the overall safety of the aircraft at risk

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