

# CHIRP

## Ground Handling & Security

### FEEDBACK

Issue No: 1

1/2016

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#### Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of FEEDBACK compiled specifically for airport Ground Handling and Security Staff. The reports have been dis-identified to protect the identity of the reporters, airports and airlines. The aim is to share information, lessons learned and good practice without embarrassing anyone in public. That does not mean there has been no action taken. Where appropriate, airline operators, airport authorities and the Civil Aviation Authority have been notified with sufficient details to take action but without identifying the reporter. Also, CHIRP has written individually to each of the reporters to make them aware of what has been done.

Your reports can help us improve safety for everyone working in the aviation industry and the travelling public. Visit our website at [www.chirp.co.uk](http://www.chirp.co.uk), send us an e-mail at [reports@chirp.co.uk](mailto:reports@chirp.co.uk) or download our App (at the App store or Google Play search for 'CHIRP air safety'). We look forward to hearing from you.

Ian Dugmore - Chief Executive

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#### Non-prescribed Medication and the Use of Recreational Drugs

A number of recent reports received have covered the use of non-prescribed medicine obtained of the internet, and of recreational drug use. Whilst the use of recreational drugs may be illegal dependent on the class of the drug, it can have the same effect as taking non-prescribed medicine. The lack of medical supervision and self-treatment using non-prescribed medication and/or taking recreational drugs is never a good idea and can be potentially harmful.

Buying recreational drugs, or medication via the internet, can be dangerous – there are no guarantees that what it says on the packet is what is in the packet. The danger ranges from completely innocuous substances being substituted for the drugs/medication that the packet purports to contain, to potentially harmful substances being substituted. You simply do not know what you are taking.

All drugs/medications have potential side-effects and have the potential to cause side-effects that could be relevant for occupational purposes and some cause drowsiness. This is especially true when doses are not being controlled/monitored. Without medical supervision this could be particularly relevant.

If taking recreational drugs, or self-treating with non-prescribed medicine, then you should seek medical advice and help, either from your Doctor or through your companies occupational health facility.

Dave Tattersall – Deputy Director (Engineering)

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## INSUFFICIENT DESPATCHER TRAINING

**Report Text:** I have recently been employed by XXX as a dispatcher at XXX airport. I have received one weeks training in the classroom, then I observed a small number of aircraft departures and arrivals with colleagues who have had a couple weeks more experience than myself. I then felt pressurised to be 'signed off' as a qualified dispatcher as soon as possible. On my first flight I was assigned to work with a colleague who had joined the company a couple of weeks after me and I was expected to give that colleague training. I work with 28 other colleagues in an office measuring 8 by 6 feet, it has 2 computers and 2 telephones and 3 chairs. We mainly work 12 hour shifts with one 2 hour unpaid break. During my week in the classroom I did not see or receive any instruction on how to use the passenger reservation or loading computer system. I did not receive any training or practice on the computer system with any training flights prior to working on live flights.

I have not been instructed on how to operate or use the Radio system. I have not been trained on the correct radio procedure, the phonetic alphabet, aircraft recognition, or the 3 letter Airport codes.

I have not been given an official tour of the airport, or received any health and safety advice on working at the airport, or shown where the fire exits are at the gates or in the airport terminal, or muster points in the event of a fire or other emergency.

**CHIRP Comment:** Following communication and agreement with the reporter it was agreed, that due to the seriousness of the report and the potential consequences, CHIRP would assist the reporter in submitting a Whistleblower report to the UK CAA.

The CAA confirmed that some aspects of the report were already known via a recent staff survey and corrective actions were in the process of being implemented. The operator was disappointed that the reporter felt unable to raise their concerns directly with them. This may be indicative of the previous manager's behaviour and attitude.

Concerns regarding training are difficult to validate unless you are present to witness the trainer and the training on the day. However, a number of the allegations made by the Whistleblower appeared to have been valid, based on the concerns raised via the staff forums and the actions that had already been put into motion by the operator.

A number of the training documents appeared to be uncontrolled as they were without edition/ revision numbers/ dates. (This was also illustrated when two different versions of the Dispatcher Training Syllabus form were provided by two separate sources).

Improvements in XXX's dispatcher training were required. In addition to the continued promotion of an open reporting culture, XXX were required to ensure that the standards, documentation and continued oversight of dispatch training remain high on their priority list - not only for XXX but for their entire network. This would be subject to future CAA audits.

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## SECURITY CONCERN

**Report Text:** I am concerned about the effectiveness of the airport security staff at [ ] due to routine under manning and an increased workload while [a nearby] airport is closed.

The security staff work 12 hours a day and three on, three off with the shifts starting at either 05:30, 06:30 or 10:00. They are constantly understaffed because the management will not hire anyone. Morale is low, and because they are low paid they routinely work overtime to make a half decent wage. Staff are also pressured into working overtime including threats to close central search if staff do not cooperate. Working 16.5 hour days (05:30 - 22:00) is not unknown.

The current workforce are expected to pick up the pieces and process an increasing number of flights and passengers with no uplift in staff. [The nearby] airport has been closed for a while for resurfacing and all the [operator] flights have been transferred to [ ], which can be up to 25 extra per day. [ ] airline have seen a marked increase in activity and a marked increase in the number of passengers using the airport.

Now this sounds like a day to day running of a security dept. but the worrying thing for me is that whilst the security staff there are absolutely brilliant at what they do, they are still putting bags and passengers onto aeroplanes. How much longer can they be short of staff and keep their current staff working under these

conditions with moral as low as it is before something goes wrong? An aircraft loss could be the ultimate price because whether we like it or not they are obviously the last line of defence between a terrorist and an aeroplane.

**CHIRP Comment:** The inspector responsible for auditing airport security at [ ] visits the airport 3-4 times each year to conduct audits/inspections and considers it to be one of the better ones in their portfolio. To pass muster, the airport procedures and facilities must meet a variety of functional requirements. The inspections do not include staff working hours, shift patterns (or pay) but the inspector believes it would be obvious if there were security staff who were sufficiently tired to affect their performance. Also, airport staff chat to the inspectors and could be expected to mention excessive demands from the management. The inspector concedes that there may be times when working hours are very high, e.g. covering for staff absences etc.; however, they were unable to reconcile the pressures reported with what they have routinely seen themselves, even during the period when the airport was handling traffic that would normally have used [the nearby airport].

Clearly the inspector's opinion about the airport is at odds with the reporter's. Given the importance of effective security and the potential implications of a breach, it seems unlikely that the inspectors would allow themselves to lower their standards. Could they be having the wool pulled over their eyes by the airport management? It is possible and it would explain the differences in perception. Having raised the reporter's concerns with the appropriate authority, the inspections will be more intrusive and include the pressures on the security staff.

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### PRE-FLIGHT WALKROUND INSPECTIONS AND REFUELLING

**Report Text:** I was standing by while the aircraft (a non-UK AOC A320) arrived on stand and positioned my hydrant refuelling truck under the left wing (time STD -35). After making all the necessary connections and been given the "green light", I commenced refuelling. During the 15-20 minutes it took to refuel this aircraft, I thought it odd that I never observed either pilot doing their pre-flight walkround inspection and never was there one of the pilots positioned at the nose of the aircraft to communicate with the flight deck if necessary while passengers were boarding as should be done under EASA rules when refuelling is in operation.

At STD -10 I completed the refuelling procedure and took the ticket to the flight deck for the required signature. Then I moved my truck from under the wing and parked up along the stand to complete my paperwork. At STD -5 I noticed the First Officer come down the air bridge stairs, breeze past the front of the left engine, go under the fuselage across to the front of right engine, and then immediately return back up the stairs. This took all of approximately 20 seconds!

All that this pilot could have observed during this extremely brief inspection was that the large pieces of the aircraft were in their relatively normal locations. To think that the 150+ passengers, plus cabin staff, blindly trusted this flight crew to do a professional and thorough job at all times and in reality this is what actually happens. I would find this unbelievable if I had not witnessed it myself. And, I have observed many pre-flight inspections in my time. Some better than others, with some being on the side of failure but this takes the cake!

Perhaps the CAA should take some time to periodically observe the standard of pre-flight inspections which actually occur. It may save some lives.

**CHIRP Comment:** Pilot responsibilities include managing risks and it is not known whether the flight crew on this foreign-operated aircraft were occupied with a conflicting task. However, the regulations covering refuelling are as follows:

AMC1 CAT.OP.MPA.195 Refuelling/defuelling with passengers embarking, on board or disembarking

(c) Operational procedures should specify that at least the following precautions are taken:

(1) One qualified person should remain at a specified location during fuelling operations with passengers on board. This qualified person should be capable of handling emergency procedures concerning fire protection and fire-fighting, handling communications and initiating and directing an evacuation;

2) Two-way communication should be established and should remain available by the aeroplane's inter-communication system or other suitable means between the ground crew supervising the refuelling and the qualified personnel on board the aeroplane; the involved personnel should remain within easy reach of the system of communication;

Since these requirements do not appear to have been met, the refueller was correct to draw attention to the issue by submitting a report. Similarly, the brief walk round inspection by the flight crew may not have met the requirements of the operator's Operations Manual and was also correctly reported. Reports such as these are used to inform ramp inspections as required under the EU Ramp Inspection Programme. Data from the reports as well as supplementary information are shared and centralised in a computerised database set up and managed by EASA.

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### **INCORRECT BAGGAGE LOADING BLOCKS FIRE EXTINGUISHER**

**Report Text:** I happened to do the walk round as the bags were being loaded on the aircraft. Normally the walk round is done as soon as we arrive at the aircraft so the crew usually does not see the end result of baggage loading in the cargo holds. I noticed the bags were loaded full to the ceiling in the front hold of the aircraft which blocks off the air space for the Fire Suppressant system. This must be happening all the time without crews' knowledge.

I asked the handlers to remove the bags above the red-painted cargo line and asked if they understood why. They did not, saying they were worried about their jobs if they didn't get all the bags on the aircraft. I explained the safety reason and said they should leave bags off, let the company know why and they would not be punished for safety reasons. I asked them to pass this information on to their colleagues and I would contact the airline to email the Handling Company.

In these days of targets for workers their focus was on doing a good job loading all the bags.

They were afraid of losing their jobs if bags were left behind. It took some convincing that otherwise they would be putting the passengers, aircraft, crew and airline at a huge risk if they loaded up to the ceiling to try to fit all the bags on board. Somehow the safety implications were not explained to them.

Is there a way to inform all airport authorities, handling agents, aviation companies and crews around the world as this must be happening on a daily basis, everywhere putting crew, passengers and aircraft at risk without knowing it? It must have been going on for years and has somehow not been picked up especially on small and medium aircraft where bags are loaded directly and not in containers. I think this is a major safety risk.

**CHIRP Comment:** There is no doubt that handlers/loaders are under pressure to load as many bags as they can get in the hold every time. In addition, airlines expect loading distributions (bag numbers) to be adhered to which will influence their actions but would hope that they are cognisant of the load limit requirement and the potential consequences. Whilst some aircraft will have 'load limit' line placards in the cargo holds others only have a prescribed clearance distance to be observed. Whatever limits/constraints are applicable they should be communicated by the operator to the handling agents/loaders and then observed.

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## Contact Us

Dave Tattersall - Deputy Director (Engineering)

CHIRP, Centaur House, Ancells Business Park, Ancells Road, FLEET, GU51 2UJ

Freephone (UK only): 0800 772 3243 or Telephone: +44 (0) 1252 378947 E-mail: [reports@chirp.co.uk](mailto:reports@chirp.co.uk)

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