

VOLCANIC DUST – RISK MANAGEMENT OR RISK AVERSION?

What is it?

Volcanic ash or dust was produced when the volcano in Iceland erupted. Allegedly, tons of dust and ash were catapulted into the sky and formed a cloud which drifted from Iceland over the UK and Northern Europe.

The dust or ash was alleged to have been so severe that if it entered the engines of the world's commercial air fleet, there was a great risk that engines would shut down mid flight and planes would fall out of the sky.



So, the "powers that be" shut down the UK's airspace. Some of Europe followed suit. Altogether, travelling chaos was caused for over half a million people who wanted to fly into and out of the UK.

Was it Risk Management or wholesale Risk Aversion?

Was it a good idea to shut down the UK's air space?

Yes

- Better to be safe than sorry
- If a plane fell out of the sky, killing all on board and potentially hundreds on the ground then there would have been a media frenzy
- The Government, via NATS, would have been negligent if fatalities had occurred
- Corporate manslaughter charges could have been brought
- We need to develop our knowledge all the time – it was an unknown event and the experts weren't sure how to handle it
- Surely we can all handle a little inconvenience from time to time
- Good opportunity to reduce carbon emissions
- Made people realise how dependent we have become on air travel

No



- Information available didn't support the decision taken
- No previous history of catastrophic levels of dust in the atmosphere
- Reacted too quickly – wanted to have risk averse situation
- No-one wanted to take responsibility for making a wrong decision but a collective approach and accountability could have been taken
- People will continue to distrust health and safety decisions – even when there is justification for severe action
- Modern engines much more sophisticated and less likely to react to dust particles
- Met. Office predictions on weather conditions known to be unreliable – there was no alternative back up information

What to do?

Consider carefully decisions taken on the back of "health and safety". Do not be risk averse – there will always be risk in life. Manage the likelihood of risk and its consequences.

Always take advice from competent persons – those who have knowledge, experience, common sense and are "savvy" about hazards and risks.

Review your crisis management plans. Could you cope without key members of the team, without supplies etc?

Take stock. Evaluate. Act to improve.

Who to Call?

At Perry Scott Nash, we can help you see the "clouds from the volcanic dust" and help evaluate whether you are embarking on a strategy of risk management or risk aversion. We can help put pragmatic solutions in place.

Call: Pat Perry
Janet Cox