



CORK AIRPORT TAKES PANDEMIC PRIORITIES ON BOARD



Following the outbreak of Covid-19 last year, Cork Airport reviewed its emergency plans to consider the emerging threat of the virus, moving rapidly to work with the public health authorities, according to Ken Roberts, Chief Fire Officer, who outlines the protocols they put in place to deal with this pandemic.

Cork Airport welcomed 2020 with great expectations as we looked forward to another bumper year of growth and to maintaining our record as the fastest growing airport in Ireland.

We had so many big plans – new carriers, new routes and new destinations – and then the pandemic struck. It is hard to believe that 12 months later we're now in yet another lockdown, yet the future looks brighter with a vaccination programme now underway.

As with any regulatory environment the requirements of our internal or external audit regime did not diminish due to the pandemic. As part of the airport emergency operations plan, Cork Airport is required to conduct periodic table-top and live emergency exercises.

In February 2019 we held one such table-top exercise with the key principal response agencies and interested parties. The 'scenario' was based on an in-bound aircraft with passengers on-board having a communicable disease. Little could we have envisaged that one year later we would be gearing up for the real thing!



I have worked in aviation for over 21 years, I have seen the effects of 9-11, SARS and the volcanic ash cloud on aviation but like these events, this Covid pandemic will also pass. We will beat this and yes if we stay the course, there are brighter days ahead

- Ken Roberts, Cork Airport's Chief Fire Officer

DEALING WITH EMERGING PANDEMIC THREAT

Moving rapidly to work with the HSE's Departments of Public Health and Environmental Health, we reviewed our plans to consider the emerging pandemic threat of COVID-19. These plans were based on an in-bound flight and the requirements to quarantine the flight. Luckily, at Cork Airport, we did not have to activate these plans.

However, we did find ourselves providing assistance to the public health authorities with contact tracing. At the

early stage of the pandemic we remained open to allow for repatriation of Irish nationals back home.

Slowly and steadily, as we realised just how serious and devastating this pandemic was evolving, passenger numbers reduced while the number of flights into and out of Cork, and indeed all airports globally, reduced dramatically.

When we think of an airport, most people just think it is there to help them travel for business, pleasure or personal, such as traveling to visit a sick relative or even traveling to bring home a loved one who may have passed away. However, airports are there for so much more.

ASSISTING A DIVERSE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

Cork Airport is a strategic piece of national aviation infrastructure and throughout the pandemic we have remained open and available to provide assistance for a diverse range of activities such as the following:



Throughout the pandemic Cork Airport continues to provide HEMS assistance to the Irish Coast Guard and the Irish Air Corps.



The airport's fire crews train on a regular basis to ensure that skill-sets are kept to an optimum level.

- **Search & Rescue** – Irish Coast Guard Helicopters.
- **HEMS** – Irish Air Corps Rescue 112/ Irish Community Rapid Response Air Ambulance.
- **Crew Transport** – Babcock International (serving offshore rigs off the south coast).
- **Transplant Flights** – Irish Air Corps CASA aircraft or private aircraft.
- **State Security** – An Garda Síochána's Air Support Unit.
- **Training Flights** – Atlantic Flight Training Academy (based at Cork Airport).

MAINTAINING SKILL-SETS

During this time, we have replaced our domestic fire tender and one of our major foam tenders. Our crews underwent extensive training on both new vehicles – a domestic Compact Line and the 6x6 Panther – which came from Rosenbauer (one of the world's three largest manufacturers of fire service vehicles and firefighting equipment, based in Austria).

Any change to our fire fleet requires the airport operator to work through a management of change process and to gain approval from the regulator.



The process in changing any of our big fleet vehicles takes months of work from the business case to getting approval for funding, procurement processes, testing, delivery, and associated training requirements, before the vehicles are finally ready for service.

We all had to get used to the new 'norm' – wearing face masks, social distancing and hand sanitisation. We implemented new training protocols to allow us to continue training during the pandemic, and it is vital that the crews continue to train on a regular basis to ensure that skill-sets are kept at an optimum level.

MONITORING WILDLIFE

Due to the decrease in standard commercial aviation traffic, there has been an increase in wildlife activity.

This needs to be monitored closely and documented to ensure that the safety of flight activity is not negatively impacted.

STAFF WELLBEING

daa Group, which operates both Dublin and Cork Airports, delivers a key focus on safety for those utilising the airports and staff members.

Cork Airport was the first airport in the State to achieve the Airport Council International's Airport Health Accreditation Programme Certificate.

Staff wellbeing has come to the fore during this pandemic; its important to keep in touch with colleagues, from socially-distanced briefings to zoom meetings...with the most common saying "you're on mute!"

For those staff required to be onsite, staff testing is now part of the norm with a COVID test centre on the airport campus.

POLICING DURING THE PANEDMIC

Traditionally the only day that there are no passengers going through Cork Airport is on Christmas Day. However, policing the airport campus during this



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pandemic is now quite eerie, to say the least.

The normally buzzing terminal, with passengers and staff, is currently devoid of people; the normally full carpark stands empty and there are very few visitors to the airport, except those from the local community who venture out for the bit of exercise.

However, regardless of the situation, the airport and the campus must be constantly policed to ensure the security of this vital piece of state infrastructure.

CRISIS PRESENTS OPPORTUNITY

With every crisis there is opportunity. Cork Airport started a number of big infrastructure projects during the pandemic as follows:

- Refurbishment of the departures lounge floor.
- Upgrade of the airport hold baggage screening process with new state-of-the-art security x-ray screening machines making air travel more safe and secure.
- Upgrade of the airport's car parking facilities.

- Upgrade to the IT flight information displays.
- Installation of a COVID test centre.

Celebrating 60 years in operation this year, Cork Airport is also in the final stages of sign-off for a runway reconstruction project, which is the biggest runway project since the airport first opened in 1961.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

When we look back on 2020 and 2021, we will firstly reflect on the terrible loss of those who have succumbed to the coronavirus both nationally and globally. We will recognise that the world did come together to fight a single foe.

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As an island nation it is in our genes to travel far and wide. Aviation will be here to cater for those needs, and we patiently wait for the time when we can welcome people back to our shore and wish them a 'Cead Míle Fáilte'.

As a nation we will be ready and we at Cork Airport stand ready.



SECURITY AND SAFETY IN OPERATION

The role of the Airport Fire & Rescue Service at a state aerodrome is divided into two main key areas of operation – Security and Safety.

Security: To provide a policing security presence under the remit of Airports and Aviation Acts (Irish Statutory Instrument) and EU Regulation 300 of 2008 and associated EU regulation in the field of civil aviation security in relation to surveillance and patrols.

Safety: To provide a Rescue Firefighting Service to the aviation sector in line with the EU Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). The Airport Fire Service is also responsible for additional safety-related tasks such as wildlife management, runway inspections and the airports snow and ice plan.

The Chief Airport Fire Officer is responsible for airport emergency plan and liaises closely with the county inter-agency emergency planning office. In the areas of security and safety the key elements are to ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements. Everyday auditability is a vital aspect to the role of the Airport Police & Fire Service.