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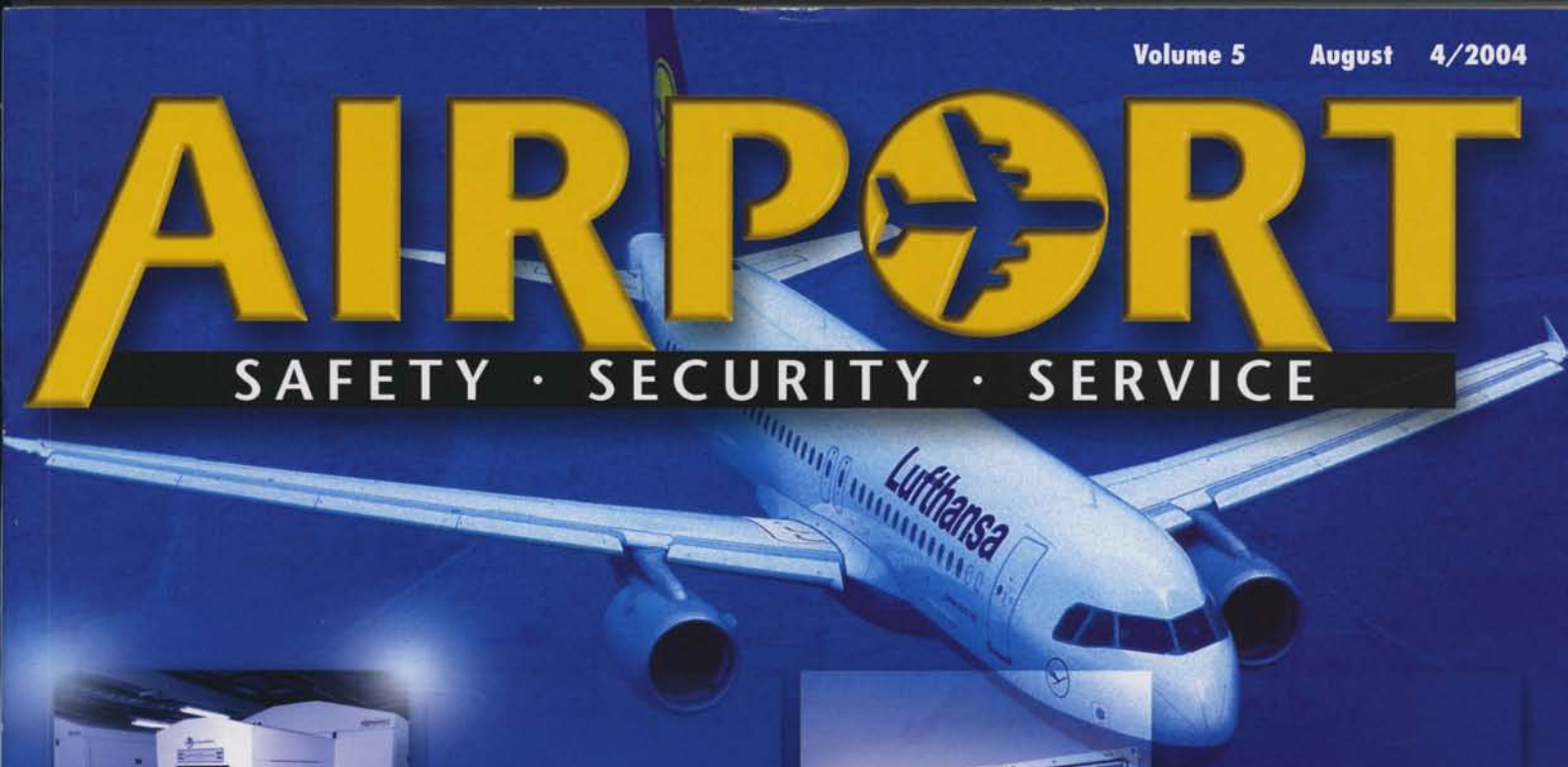
AIRPORT

SAFETY · SECURITY · SERVICE



COVER: L-3 Communications "We Simply Cannot Remain Static"

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Crisis Management – **Imperative in Civil Aviation**

Inadequate Crisis Management can bring a company to the edge of ruin. Unfortunately most companies only realise this when they are already precariously close to the edge. Often forgotten however, is that an incident or accident can cause an enormous amount of damage to a company's image. What do they need to be professionally prepared for an emergency?

Bruno Hersche

Not Only Chemical and Oil Companies Endangered

A mistake, which can have enormous consequences, is the assumption that serious incidents can only happen to companies dealing with chemicals or radioactive materials. The 11th April 1996 proved dramatically, how simple welding can cause a catastrophe. Germany's second largest airport was almost destroyed by the resulting fire, which claimed 17 lives.

Any company, be it an airport or airline can be hit by a major incident. It must be realised, that crisis situations cannot be effectively mastered by the normal daily routine. A well prepared and thought out Crisis Management system, tailored to the respective needs is the first important step in the road to damage limitation.

Crisis Management Organisation

A Crisis Management Organisation needs to address at least the following points

- Have a special Crisis Management structure, which allows timely and situation relative decisions.
- The difficult communication needs in crisis situations
- A well prepared Crisis Communication Concept for the media onslaught.
- Dependant on the known potential for the likelihood of an incident, safeguarding staff, management and the environment.
- Create special rights and procedures for emergencies to ensure fast decision making
- Practical tools (Crisis Manual and Checklists) and appropriate infrastructure (Crisis Centres) need to be in place.
- In Crisis situations, the use of web based Crisis Management Software (for example that in use by Austrian Airlines and being considered by other airline members of the Star Alliance), should be examined.
- Only trained staff are capable of coping in a crisis.

Organisation and Crisis Management Structure

The managing of a crisis needs an organisation and Crisis Management Structure with these attributes:

- The ability to function quickly, even outside normal working hours
- Clear functions and command structures both internally and in dealing with external agencies.
- Command structures that allow quick decisions
- Special authority that allows the necessary action to be taken
- No prestige thinking and sticking to daily routines
- Clear borders of competence with official agencies and authorities, without forfeiting the important close working relationship.

The Crisis Management Team

A central position in Crisis Management is the Crisis Management Team. Practical experience has shown it is advisable to create a small core crisis team.

- That can be reached at all times
- That can be quickly mobilised
- Irrespective of the type of incident, always comes together in the same configuration
- That is properly trained in Crisis Management work
- For which notification comes at a relatively low level (routine).

The Crisis Management teams needs an assisting team whose duties include the visualisation, telecommunications, message taking, documentation, secretarial duties, and access control.

For each function, task books must be available, which clearly define the duties and roles of each Crisis Management Team member.

Checklists Are Keystones of Crisis Management

Elaborate voluminous Crisis Management manuals describe the objectives, polices and organisation. They supply the foundations on which Crisis Management is carried out and are the basis for training.

In a crisis situation however they are usually left in the cupboard and handy checklists are used.

Those who use checklists at the appropriate time will, in spite of the enormous pressure, be able to carry out their duties – in the correct order while still analysing the situation. Modern Corporations and businesses such as the Deutsche Bundesbank or Duesseldorf International Airport use such lists with great success.

To be able to operate in such conditions, suitable infrastructure such as a Crisis Management Centre must be on hand. Under consideration of the amount of time a Crisis Management centre is used, a double or shared function is acceptable as long as a quick set up time is guaranteed. All too often a highly technically equipped room is created in which efficient Crisis Management is impossible. Chaotic and inefficient meeting are the end product.

Separate rooms are needed for meetings, individual staff work, telecommunication, secretarial work and catering.

Detail Concept

In crisis situations events take a completely different direction than in normal working conditions. This must be planned for and a detailed concept must be prepared.

A Management Concept applies to the management structure and includes:

- The delegation of functions
- The availability of function holders together with their respective assistance.
- The afore mentioned task books

Communication Concept

Especially difficult, but very important, is the area of communication. Not always clear is that:

Mobile telephones seldom work during an emergency, as the network capacity is soon exceeded by the number of people trying to use their phones.

Modern telephone systems are often run on software that can crash or become overloaded.

Important for a Crisis Management communication concept is to be aware of and use the different areas such as wire, digital services, radio and the use of couriers.

Crisis Communication

Quite often those responsible for Crisis Communication have difficulty accepting, that during a crisis situation, a special concept is essential. Especially Crisis Communication needs special attention, which itself requires forethought and planning. The biggest problem is often the three areas needed to be covered (management, press work at the front [talking to reporters etc.] and running the media-back-office) cannot be covered by the normally available number of staff.

Training Concept

The Crisis Management plans as a whole will be ineffective, if the different functions holders are unable to carry out their respective tasks due to lack of knowledge. The same applies to checklists. This can only be achieved with tuition or training.

Conclusion

Crisis Management is a complex subject which needs to be tackled correctly. It is an investment which cannot be easily quantified, but will bring great advantages to a company. A lack of Crisis Management will be expensive, not only in monetary terms but certainly in image loss.

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