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## Ash Spreads Across Europe, Closing More Airports Friday

MARK McDONALD, NICOLA CLARK and LIZ ROBBINS

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A vast, high-altitude cloud of volcanic ash continued to spread over northern Europe on Friday as airspace and Europe's busiest airports remained closed and thousands of flights and millions of passengers around the world — from North America to Asia — were affected.

Eurocontrol, the agency in Brussels that is responsible for coordinating air traffic management across the region, said the cloud's impact "will continue for at least the next 24 hours." British aviation authorities said there would be no flights over British airspace until early Saturday morning, and Germany's civil aviation authority said Friday that at least 12 of the country's 16 airports were closed — including Frankfurt, a major hub for Lufthansa; as well as Hamburg, Bremen, Hannover, Dortmund, Cologne, Leipzig, Münster-Osnabrück and Berlin.

Eurocontrol said it expected more than 60 percent of the 28,000 scheduled daily flights across Europe would be cancelled on Friday. Only 11,000 flights were likely to take place, it said, just over half the 20,334 flights that were completed successfully on Thursday. Of the 300 flights that would usually arrive in Europe in the morning, only about one third arrived Friday, Eurocontrol said.

The massive plume, caused by the eruption Wednesday of a glacial volcano in Iceland, was drifting slowly eastward on Friday over central Europe and western Russia.

Eurocontrol said that much of Polish airspace, including Warsaw airport, was now closed and said the region would likely continue to face severe disruptions to air travel for at least another 24 hours.

While satellite photographs from above showed the cloud to be dark and menacing, it remained largely invisible for many people on the ground in Europe. Made up of minute particles of silicate that can disable jet engines, the cloud forced the closure of some of the world's busiest airports on Thursday and Friday, including Heathrow and Gatwick in Britain, Charles de Gaulle and Orly in Paris, as well as hubs in Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

There were hopes that some of European airports would reopen Friday afternoon as the ash cloud dissipated. But Britain's National Air Traffic Service said early on Friday that "restrictions preventing flights in English controlled airspace will remain in place until 0100 (UK time) tomorrow, Saturday 17 April, at the earliest." The agency added that some airspace closures had been lifted in Northern Ireland and the northern parts of Scotland, and that airports — including Glasgow — had reopened and would remain so until 7 p.m.

"In general, the situation cannot be said to be improving with any certainty," the agency said. Britain closed its entire airspace on Thursday, effectively severing links to, from and across some of the world's busiest aviation routes. The closing represented the country's most drastic peacetime flight restriction, aviation experts said.

About 6,000 scheduled flights use British airspace in an average day, the experts said. It was not immediately clear if the cloud would affect world leaders planning to attend the state funeral on Sunday of President Lech Kaczynski of Poland and his wife, who were killed last week in a plane crash. The White House had said before the volcano erupted that President Obama would depart Washington on Saturday evening to fly to Krakow, Poland, for the funeral.



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The volcano erupted Wednesday for the second time in a month, forcing evacuations and causing flooding about 75 miles east of Reykjavik, Iceland's capital. Matthew Watson, a specialist at Bristol University in England in the study of volcanic ash clouds, said the plume was "likely to end up over Belgium, Germany, the Lowlands — a good portion over Europe," and was unlikely to dissipate for 24 hours or more.

Eurocontrol, the agency in Brussels that is responsible for coordinating air traffic management across the region, said Thursday that disruptions to air traffic could last an additional 48 hours, depending on weather conditions, and could extend deeper into continental Europe.

The ash from the volcano, Eyjafjallajokull (pronounced EYE-a-fyat-la-jo-kutl), was reported to be drifting at 18,000 to 33,000 feet above the earth. At those altitudes, the cloud is directly in the way of commercial airliners but not an immediate health threat to people on the ground, the International Volcanic Health Hazard Network, based in Britain, said on its Web site.

According to the Volcanic Ash Advisory Center in London, as of 1 p.m. Thursday local time, there was still "significant eruption continuing," with the plume reaching 15,000 feet, but "occasionally" as high as 33,000 feet.

On Thursday, 5,000 to 6,000 of the 28,000 daily flights across Europe were canceled as a result of the ash plume, said Lucia Pasquini, a Eurocontrol spokeswoman.

The closing of British airspace disrupted the great majority of trans-Atlantic flights, including those on the New York-London route, the second busiest international route in the world after the Hong Kong to Taipei, Taiwan, route, according to the International Air Transport Association. Eurocontrol said roughly half of the 600 daily flights between North America and Europe would probably face cancellations or delays on Friday.

"It is a significant disruption," said Steve Lott, a spokesman for the air transport association. "What presents more of a challenge is that we don't know the end date." He added, "If this closed airspace continues to grow larger, the airlines will have fewer route options."

Travel chaos extended all the way to the Asia-Pacific, where major carriers like Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines and Qantas, the Australian airline, were among those that canceled, delayed or diverted flights to and from Europe on Thursday and Friday.

Qantas said in a statement on Friday that it would not offer flights to Europe, "as on current estimations, airspace into Europe will not be open for at least another 24 hours." As the effects of the disruptions spread, the carrier canceled a Friday flight from Melbourne to Hong Kong.

As the cloud made its way high across the English Channel on Thursday, French aviation officials shut Charles de Gaulle and Orly after having closed about 20 other airports. The civil aviation authority said all the airports would remain closed until at least 2 p.m. Friday. The only sign of the cloud in Paris was a slight haziness in an otherwise blue sky.

Major American carriers that fly to Britain were allowing their passengers to rebook flights without penalty on Thursday. Eurocontrol said areas of airspace in northern Germany and Poland closed late Thursday.

The potential economic effect of the closings is "virtually impossible" to determine at this stage, said Peter Morris, chief economist at Ascend, an aviation consultancy in London.

"A ballpark estimate would be that half a million to a million people's travel will be disrupted in the U.K. over a couple of days, assuming things start to clear up soon," he said. "For the long-haul players, especially those headed to the other side of the world, it's a nightmare."

Globally, the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation, an industry consultancy based in Sydney, said Friday that if the disruptions continued for three days “some 6 million passengers will be affected” — and many could forfeit their flights.

“As an Act of God, the volcano’s impact nullifies insurance claims for canceled flights,” the group said.

Inside Terminal 4 at Heathrow on Thursday, where flights usually leave London for Houston, New York and Paris, among many other destinations, all check-in counters were closed. Arrival and departure boards listed all flights as canceled. Some of the travelers seemed stoic about their fate.

Jai Purohit, a manager from Leicester, England, who had planned fly to the United States to join his wife on vacation in Florida, said: “It’s very sad. I bought some nice presents for my wife and was looking forward to spending some time with her. She’s naturally upset, but there’s nothing we can do.”

An American traveler, Anne Evans, who had arrived in London from San Francisco, said she had been on her way to take up a teacher training position in Sri Lanka when she learned that her connecting flight was canceled.

“There’s nothing you can do,” she said. “You can either smile or cry, and I decided to smile.”

Although volcanic ash clouds sometimes limit pilots’ visibility, their most serious safety threat is the harm they can cause to engines in flight. In recent decades, more than 90 aircraft have suffered damage from volcanic plumes, according to the International Civil Aviation Authority, an arm of the United Nations.

Volcanic ash is primarily made of silicates, or glass fibers, which, once ingested into a jet engine, can melt, causing the engine to flame out and stall.

It was impossible to predict how long the delays might last or the extent of the flight cancellations, since the volcano was still erupting, said Ms. of the National Air Traffic Service.

The perils of volcanic ash are well known to pilots and airline operators. After the 1982 eruption of the Galunggung volcano in Indonesia, for example, a Boeing 747 flying to Australia from Malaysia lost power in all four engines because of ash and descended to 12,500 feet from 36,000 feet before pilots could restart the engines and make an emergency landing in Indonesia.

In Iceland, hundreds of people fled their homes to avoid flooding after the eruption early on Wednesday melted the Eyjafjallajokull glacier. But Icelandic airports remained open because they are west of the volcano and wind was blowing the ash away to the south and east.