

Consistency in an unpredictable world

Stuart Smith says that one of the benefits of Volga-Dnepr Group is that it creates unique combined solutions, especially for the aid sector when responding to large, global disasters or humanitarian incidents

Volga-Dnepr Airlines has been at the forefront of disaster response for many years. Its chartered cargo operations have provided urgent flights to mitigate consequences of recent natural disasters, including Hurricane Irma in 2017, the Nepal quake of 2015, and the Haiti earthquake in 2011. AirBridge Cargo (ABC) and its strategic partner, Cargo Logic Air, also responded to disease outbreaks, organising charter flights for airlifts during the 2015 Ebola outbreak and in the Caribbean in 2017. In 2018, Volga-Dnepr's major responses were to the cyclone that affected the Northern Marina Islands in the Pacific and to the Indonesian earthquake and tsunami (see *CRJ* 14:1). Volga-Dnepr's US office arranged over 40 flights using IL-76TC-90VD and AN-124-100 to the islands on behalf of FEMA and contractors. Its European offices arranged five charter flights to Indonesia on behalf of government agencies.

Customers are typically those related to government donors, such as national emergency departments

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and development agencies, UN agencies, Red Cross and NGOs. There is also a rising trend towards private sector manufacturers and service providers being asked to deliver under their contract of sale.

Proactive engagement with the relief sector is vital, and Volga-Dnepr constantly monitors disaster updates from the EU and the UN GDACS system. It proactively sends its airport and air cargo information to its stakeholders when a major disaster has occurred and is looking to host this in the future via a special landing page.

The first wave of humanitarian aid is usually almost always about speed. As the response evolves, value and efficiency are more important, owing to the limited budgets of aid agencies, so the airline usually tries to integrate more of a combined approach. Volga-Dnepr is following a partnership programme to expand its network into more of the disaster-prone areas where it does not currently serve on regular basis.

In order to achieve the fastest air logistics response to a humanitarian crisis or disaster, the company has some advice for relief agencies: Enter into dialogue with the private sector and understand the different skillsets and capabilities of the air cargo sector. After the UN World Humanitarian Summit of 2016, a new spirit of partnership has evolved, and it is encouraging relief agencies to talk to it about the possibility of special terms, framework agreements and innovations that will improve the efficiency of air cargo response after a disaster. Volga-Dnepr Group is also heavily involved in workshops, events and round-table seminars with agencies and students.

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