

Holiday weather causes flight delays

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DESPITE the snow and cold temperatures, airline passengers flying in and out of the airport here saw only a few delays during the Christmas holidays.

"We haven't had any problems at this airport regarding the weather," said Carmen Hendry, airport development manager at the Northwest Regional Airport.

"The only weather conditions that bothered us is Vancouver, the delays in Vancouver and cancellations out of Vancouver but we are pretty well open for business over the holiday season."

But it's not a typical year for flights.

"This is a weird year actually. Normally we don't have this many misses here," he added, saying that misses refers to planes that did not land here.

"I can't comment on why they didn't [land]," he said about some Air Canada flights.

Local airlines Hawkair and Central Mountain Air didn't miss any landings, Hendry believed.

Weather problems for CMA usually affect their planes coming out of Dease Lake, he added.

Air Canada Jazz spokesperson Debra Williams said the national airline added extra flights and extra staff in Vancouver and tried to keep its website up to date with any travel advisories in order to deal with the winter weather.

Airline crew members constantly monitor the weather during flights to determine if it's safe to land, she added.

The early evening flight Dec. 30 from Vancouver to Terrace flew all the way up here and then returned to Vancouver after pilots determined they couldn't land due to visibility.

A couple of flights were missed during Christmas week but otherwise the only ones cancelled were out of Vancouver, according to a local Air Canada Jazz employee.

Despite reports that Air Canada had trouble landing planes on Christmas Eve, the airline kept to its schedule of three flights each day for Dec. 24, Christmas Day and Boxing Day, she said.

There's more than just visibility that goes into the decision whether to land: runway conditions, the weight and balance of the plane, how much fuel it's carrying and the alternate airport all have to be considered in each situation, said Williams. Transport Canada regulations have to also be considered, she added.

Darryl Tucker, director of marketing and sales for Hawkair, said the airline had delays as expected but no cancellations.

Since Hawkair flies the same planes as Air Canada, he attributes that difference in success rate to the fact that Hawkair is based out of the north and the pilots are residents.

"The reality is our pilots live here and are used to the flights where the other people's pilots aren't necessarily conditioned to the weather up here," he said, adding that Hawkair pilots follow Transport Canada regulations too.

"It's not that they're (Hawkair pilots) doing anything unsafe but that they know what they can do."

Some of the pilots have spent 1,000s of hours in this area which contributes to whether they feel comfortable landing here.

Central Mountain Air staff couldn't be reached for comment on its flight schedule over the holidays.