



Airport Closure Q&A

Updated Tuesday, 17 February 2026

Please note that this document is subject to change.

Some answers are based on our best understanding of the situation at this time, but may be subject to revision at a later date.

Question	Answer
What issues do the fire trucks have?	All three airport fire fighting vehicles have unserviceable water pumps due to a common component failure across the fleet.
Why wasn't the issue identified earlier? Why didn't regular maintenance pick this up?	The pump gearbox is serviced on an annual basis, and it was during this scheduled interval that the fault was discovered. The maintenance requirement applies only once per year.
When was the problem identified?	<p>The fault was first identified in December 2025 during the scheduled annual service of one primary fire truck. The vehicle was declared unserviceable and taken offline. An immediate order was placed for spares and replacement pumps before the supplier closed for the Christmas period.</p> <p>To mitigate risk, inspections were introduced every second week of the second primary truck to monitor for similar issues. Despite these precautions, on 5 February the second truck developed a more severe manifestation of the same fault following an oil check. This left the airport unable to maintain compliance with the Category 6 requirement.</p>
Why can't the airport operate without fire trucks?	The airport operates under regulatory supervision by Air Safety Support International (ASSI), which issues the Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements (OTARs) in alignment with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards. These regulations define both the level of fire-fighting capability an airport must maintain, and the maximum aircraft size permitted to operate there. At present, the airport is unable to operate beyond Category 4.
One fire truck having a fault is understandable but all three at the same time – how was this	The priority is restoring air operations to Category 6. The circumstances leading up to this situation will be



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allowed to happen? Who is to blame?	<p>investigated, ensuring the facts are established objectively and any root causes identified.</p> <p>Aviation embraces the principle of just culture, often described as a “no-blame culture.” This means that when issues arise whether technical faults, operational errors or safety concerns, the focus is not on assigning faults to individuals but on understanding the circumstances and learning from them.</p> <p>The process emphasises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transparency: ensuring all relevant information is shared openly.• Fairness: distinguishing between honest mistakes and wilful negligence.• Learning: identifying systemic issues, technical failures or procedural gaps so improvements can be made.• Safety enhancement: using findings to strengthen resilience and prevent recurrence, rather than punish.
What is the plan to get the fire truck parts to the island?	<p>The parts have been sourced and will be dispatched to the island imminently. They are expected to be received later this week.</p>
How long will the disruption to service be?	<p>Currently, flights on 10, 14, and 15 February have been cancelled. The decision whether to cancel the scheduled flight on 17 February will be taken later in the week. However, it is not expected that any commercial flights will operate before 21 February at the earliest. Regular updates will be provided.</p>
What about medical evacuations?	<p>The current Category 4 approval means that medevac flights can operate normally.</p>
What impact will this have on medication and other essentials being airfreighted?	<p>At present our stock levels of medication are not at risk, the situation is being kept under close review. Category 4 approval means there is now a viable air route for emergencies.</p>
What support is being offered to passengers waiting to travel inbound and outbound during the disruption and who is paying for this?	<p>For residents inbound SHG has arranged with Solomons to assist with accommodation and subsistence during the period of the delay. This will only apply to residents returning home. Passengers</p>



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	<p>are encouraged to contact Solomons for updates on accommodation arrangements.</p> <p>For outbound passengers, normal cancellation Hotel Operating Terms and Management (HOTAM) arrangements will apply and this is also being managed by Solomons. St Helena Tourism is hosting daily briefings at 10am in the Mantis Hotel.</p> <p>Until further notice, people are urged not to travel to South Africa for onward travel to St Helena unless they are returning home.</p>
What options are being considered to resolve the issue and get the airport back in operation?	<p>A range of options are being pursued to return the airport to normal operations as quickly as possible. Spare parts have been located, and sourcing for alternate fire tenders is underway, with potential support from the United Kingdom Government (UKG). All viable options are being explored in parallel to ensure the quickest short-term and best long-term solutions.</p>
What agencies/people are involved?	<p>In St Helena's emergency framework, Gold Command acts as the strategic responsible for setting objectives during a major incident. It is led by the Chief Secretary. This group ensures the response has the necessary resources and political alignment. Supporting this structure is the St Helena Resilience Forum (SHRF), a multi-agency body that includes emergency services, government portfolios, and utility providers. This includes SHG officials, Governor's Office, Emergency Planning, St Helena Airport Ltd, and Solomon & Company Shipping & Travel. All are actively engaged and collaborating to bring the situation to resolution.</p>
Will new and existing flight bookings be suspended until the problem is resolved and the airport returns to Category 6??	<p>Airlink have currently suspended new bookings to St Helena to avoid confusion. This should not be taken as an indication of how long the disruption will last and flights will only be cancelled on a week-by-week basis, as necessary.</p> <p>As of today, 09 February 2026, only flights for 10, 14 and 15 February 2026 have been cancelled.</p>



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Local businesses will lose money from expected visitors; can they seek compensation for loss in earning and possibly reputational damage?	<p>A review is currently being undertaken to establish what assistance can be provided in these circumstances. Those with appropriate business insurance should consult their providers.</p> <p>A representative from the Economic Development portfolio will be consulting with affected businesses to understand the financial impacts.</p>
What are the different airport category classifications?	<p>The Aerodrome category for rescue and firefighting is the classification that stipulates the type of aircraft that an airport can handle based on the capability of the fire appliances at the airport.</p>
What does this mean for our tourism sector?	<p>Independent Public Relations advice indicates that the impact of negative travel news is usually short-term, with confidence typically returning within around three months once issues are resolved.</p> <p>Travel agents operate on longer planning cycles and can be affected more quickly, which is why St Helena Tourism is leading proactive engagement to maintain confidence and strong working relationships.</p> <p>St Helena Tourism will further be working with all local businesses to understand the financial impact on them and to encourage positive messaging to their overseas clients.</p>
What will the airport staff be doing while the airport is non-operational?	<p>Airport staff will continue carrying out their responsibilities, including readiness for medical evacuation and charter flights, in line with Category 4 status. In addition, they will maintain oversight and servicing of airport equipment to ensure operational readiness.</p>
Will my flight be refunded?	<p>This is between the airline, the customer, and the insurer and will depend on whether you travel at a future date.</p>
Why is SHG taking the lead on this? Isn't this an operational matter for the Airport?	<p>The Airport is a state-owned entity and serves as a vital national asset, with its operations having far reaching impacts across the island. In keeping with the island's emergency planning processes and procedures, SHG has assumed the lead role to coordinate the overall response. The Airport continues to focus on the operational work needed to restore services safely, while SHG provides whole-of-government oversight and coordination.</p>



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If any chartered flights are coming to the island, are there seats available for passengers who were affected by the cancelled flights?	Chartered flights organised by SHG may have seats available for inbound and outbound travel. Seats will be allocated according to a priority list.
What are the criteria for the SHG chartered flights passenger priority list?	Passengers with urgent health needs will be given first priority followed by essential workers who are required on island to boost resilience.
Can individuals organise their own chartered flights?	Individuals can organise and fund their own chartered flights for inbound and outbound travel. This should be coordinated directly with St Helena Airport.
Is St Helena prepared to respond effectively to a Major Incident?	<p>St Helena Government maintains a robust and continuously improved emergency-planning framework. A formally documented Major Incident Response Plan is regularly reviewed and tested through tabletop exercises and multi-agency scenarios based on realistic risks. Lessons from both exercises and real events are used to strengthen procedures.</p> <p>To ensure effective joint working during an incident, SHG delivers on-island Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) training for all responding agencies and facilitates Multi-Agency Gold Incident Command (MAGIC) training to build strong strategic incident-command capability. Clear command, control and coordination structures operate across Gold, Silver and Bronze levels, with defined roles and escalation processes.</p> <p>Preparedness is supported by active engagement from multi-agency partners to maintain a coordinated island-wide response.</p>
When will the next Ascension flight take place?	We are currently working with Airlink and Ascension Island Government to establish when flights to Ascension can resume. This is primarily down to flight crew availability.
When will Airlink resume bookings?	Future bookings are now open again, for flights on or after 24 February. Bookings for 21 February may come available if the flight is not full with repatriations.
Will there be an investigation into the cause of the Major Incident?	Once operations are fully back to normal, we will investigate the circumstances leading up to the airport closure.



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What costs were incurred to rectify the issue and return the airport to Category 6 and at who's expense?	The total costs of this incident are still being ascertained. The apportionment of costs between the relevant parties will be determined at a later date.
How will affected passengers be repatriated from St Helena and Johannesburg? And will this effect existing bookings?	Those with bookings specifically for 17 and 21 February flights should continue to travel as normal. Delayed passengers will be repatriated over the next two scheduled flights. Seats will be allocated, with priority given to those who have experienced the longest delays.