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SUSPECTED COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

General Guidelines for Maintenance Crew

The following are general guidelines for maintenance crew who has to carry out maintenance on an arriving aircraft with a suspected case of communicable disease. During an outbreak of a specific communicable disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) or member states may modify or add further procedures to these general guidelines.

However, these general guidelines provide a basic framework of response to reassure the maintenance crew and help them manage such an event.

High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters

About 50% of the air in most modern aircraft is re-circulated. However, air is only reused after having gone through HEPA filters. Microorganisms suspended in air, including bacteria and viruses, are captured by HEPA filters applied to aircraft air circulation systems. Just like HEPA filters used in containment laboratories, the best HEPA cabin air filters have a microbial removal efficiency of >99.999% with bacteria and viruses. As used filters may contain microorganisms trapped in their meshes after hours of filtering activity, it is good routine practice to apply reasonable precautions when handling them, e.g. during their exchange.

There is no need to change HEPA filters on an arriving aircraft that has carried a suspected case of communicable disease. HEPA filters should rather be changed at the intervals recommended by the filter manufacturer.

When replacing HEPA filters:

1. Wear disposable gloves.
2. Avoid hitting, dropping or shaking the filter.
3. Do not use compressed air to try and clean a filter.
4. The used HEPA filter should be disposed of in a sealed plastic bag. A specific biohazard bag is not required. Put the used disposable gloves in the same plastic bag.
5. Wash hands with soap and water when the task is finished.

Vacuum waste tank

Since the external venting of the vacuum waste tanks is not equipped with filtering devices capable of preventing the spread of viral or bacterial contamination, it is not recommended to vent the vacuum waste tanks inside a hangar. If venting of the vacuum waste tanks has to be done inside a hangar, it is recommended to use a technique that exhausts the air outside of the hangar.