

Emergencies and Abnormal Situations

Occasionally, pilots want to simulate emergencies or abnormal situations on VATSIM. On VATSIM, it is the choice of the controller as to whether or not they will accept & handle an emergency, but it is nonetheless useful for controllers to know how to handle them.

- An **emergency situation** is one in which the safety of the aircraft or of persons on board or on the ground is endangered for any reason.
- An **abnormal situation** is one in which it is no longer possible to continue the flight using normal procedures but the safety of the aircraft or persons on board or on the ground is not in danger.

When faced with an emergency or abnormal situation, pilots may declare a **Mayday** or **Pan Pan**.

- **Mayday** calls are for emergencies that require **immediate attention & handling** – e.g., fire onboard, loss of engines or flight controls, pressurization failure, etc.
 - When a mayday is declared, the mayday aircraft shall have *absolute priority* over all other aircraft in the vicinity. ATC shall take any & all measures necessary to assist the aircraft in coming to a safe landing, including but not limited to stopping departures, holding arrivals to clear the approach path, etc.
- **Pan Pan** calls are for situations that are urgent but *not* emergencies, e.g., loss of a non-critical aircraft system, ill passenger onboard requiring medical assistance on the ground, etc.
 - A pan pan aircraft shall have priority handling, but not to the extent of a mayday. E.g., while a pan pan aircraft requesting a diversion should be issued a clearance/the required instructions to do so without delay, it is not necessarily required to stop all departures or hold arrivals until the pan pan aircraft is on the ground.

Real-life controllers use the memory aid "ASSIST" to respond to emergency situations. On VATSIM, controllers should use the modified version **ASSISTED**:

A cknowledge	Acknowledge the emergency and ensure you understand it.
S eparate	Establish & maintain separation with other traffic and terrain.
S ilence	Impose silence on the frequency if necessary; do not delay or disturb urgent action of the pilots with unnecessary transmissions.
I nform	Inform neighboring sectors, units, airports, etc. as appropriate.
S upport	Provide maximum support to the flight crew.
T ime	Allow the flight crew enough time to manage the emergency. ...
E lse, D isconnect	If the emergency is interfering with your ability to provide a quality service to other pilots, one may instruct the pilot to cancel their emergency or disconnect.

Remember that on VATSIM, the goal is to simulate *normal* operations as realistically as possible. On VATSIM, no emergency is "real," and VATSIM controllers have much less manpower to handle the significant workload associated with emergencies. Therefore, **you CAN refuse an emergency on VATSIM if you do not have the capacity to handle it - a right stated in the VATSIM Code of Conduct.**

Additionally, controllers should note that certain types of emergencies — hijackings and unlawful acts in general — are **prohibited** on the VATSIM network. Pilots declaring such emergencies *must* be told to cancel emergency or disconnect. (*Setting squawk 7500 — the "hijacking" emergency squawk — will automatically disconnect such pilots anyway.*)

In general, if a pilot refuses an instruction to cancel emergency or disconnect, `.wallop` the pilot and let a VATSIM Supervisor handle the matter.

"...If, for any reason, air traffic control requests the pilot to terminate the emergency, then the pilot must do so IMMEDIATELY or disconnect from the

network. Pilots are not permitted to simulate any unlawful act including, but not limited to, declaring a hijack by any method..." - Code of Conduct B6

Pilots will declare a mayday and pan pan by repeating the relevant phrase three times, e.g., "Mayday, mayday, mayday" or "Pan pan, pan pan, pan pan." The pilot will state the nature of the situation, as well as relevant information such as their intentions. *(The "intentions" are not always a "request" in the usual sense – in a Mayday/emergency situation, pilots can take whatever actions they need – without asking first – to preserve the safety of their aircraft and the lives onboard. It is ATC's job to accommodate.)* E.g.,

“☐➔ Mayday, mayday, mayday, ICE123 has an engine failure, descending to FL100, require vectors for immediate diversion to Keflavik.

“☐➔ Pan pan, pan pan, pan pan, DLH456 has an ill passenger onboard, request diversion to Keflavik and medical assistance at the gate upon arrival.

To acknowledge an emergency, ATC shall say "roger Mayday" or "roger Pan Pan" and provide instructions or information as appropriate to assist the pilots – e.g., radar vectors, descents, vectoring other aircraft out of the way, etc. ATC should also collect the following information when able, if the pilots did not already report it:

- **People on board**
- **Fuel remaining in minutes**
- If there is any **hazardous or special cargo onboard**.

E.g.,

“☐ ICE123, roger Mayday, cleared to Keflavik, fly heading 240. Do you require any assistance?

☐➔ Request straight-in approach for the closest runway, ICE123.

☐ ICE123, roger, fly heading 190, straight in approach for runway 19.

☐➔ Heading 190, straight-in approach runway 19.

☐ ICE123, when able report your people on board, fuel remaining in minutes, and if you have any hazardous or special cargo onboard.

☐→ 124 people onboard, 200 minutes of fuel remaining, no hazardous or special cargo onboard, ICE123.

☐ ICE123, roger, 124 people onboard, 200 minutes fuel remaining, no hazardous or special cargo onboard.

In general, **no two emergencies will be handled the same way**. Different types of emergencies will require different responses — e.g., a pressurization failure may require an immediate descent, but may not necessarily require an immediate landing, whereas a fire onboard generally requires an immediate landing. Pilots may also need time to complete their emergency checklists and determine their best course of action, something controllers should not rush. The most important thing is to respond in a way that is appropriate for the situation and reasonable for VATSIM, use the **ASSISTED** memory aid to support the pilot, and always *remain flexible*.

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