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SEPLA warn of ATC disruption without notice in Spanish airspace

IFALPA Member Association the Sindicato Espanol de Pilotos de Lineas Aereas (SEPLA) warns that Spanish airspace is closed until 18:00UTC 4 December.

In the last 24 hours all of Spain's airspace has been militarised. That is to say air force officers are acting as supervisors over civilian controllers. So far the civilian controllers are refusing to work under these conditions and as a result Spanish airspace remains closed until at least 18:00UTC on 4 December.

The dispute centres on the interpretation of the government order (Royal Decree 9/2010) which limits the maximum number of annual duty hours for ATCOs. A number of ATCOs say they have reached this maximum annual limit for 2010 and that therefore they are unable to continue to report for work. As a result, the Spanish Air Navigation Service Provider (ANSP) AENA does not have enough controllers available to provide coverage.

According to SEPLA, the crisis began on on 27 November at 22:00UTC the whole of the north-western part of the Madrid FIR below FL250 was closed without notice.

In this first instance, three airports used in airline operations, Corunna (LECG), Vigo (LEVX) and the region's main airport Santiago (LEST) were within the airspace affected by this closure. The lack of warning of closure would always be a concern but was made more acute since Santiago is frequently filed as an alternate for oceanic long haul flights.

Since the 27th the closure or restrictions of the nation's airspace has increased in frequency until 22:30 UTC last night when the entirety of Spain's airspace was closed until at least 1800UTC tonight.

SEPLA warn that crews operating into or through Spanish airspace between now and 1 January should take the fact that sudden closures of airspace that are not covered by NOTAM (or any other warning to operators, dispatchers or pilots) may impact their flight and adjust their flight and fuel planning figures accordingly.

Further Safety Bulletins will be issued as the situation develops.