

## Breakdown at Brazil Air Control Center Causes 100s of Delays and Cancellations

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On the heels of Brazil's deadliest air tragedy ever, Saturday brought another chaotic day to the nation's airports, which had international ramifications, interfering with flights from the United States and Central America.

This time the culprit was an electric failure brought in by a short-circuit at the Manaus' Air Defense and Air Traffic Control Integrated Center (Cindacta-4). The Manaus (capital of the Brazilian northern state of Amazonas) breakdown shut down the air traffic radar system causing a chain reaction touching the whole country's air transportation.

At the end of the day, a bulletin from the airport authority Infraero showed that from midnight Friday to 6:30 pm Saturday, 55.9% of all flights were canceled or had a delay of over one hour. From a total of 1282 flights scheduled 144 were just canceled while another 573 had to wait over one hour.

In Congonhas, Brazil's busiest airport, located in São Paulo, where the TAM crash just happened with at least 190 fatal victims, 28% of the flights were canceled. In Guarulhos, São Paulo's international airport and Brazil's main international gateway, 28% of the flights had long delays.

In Galeão, Rio's international airport, there were 15 cancellations and 61 delays. And in Brazilian capital Brasília almost half of all flights (46.6%) had to wait more than one hour beyond the scheduled time for take off.

A note from the Brazilian Air Force released Saturday night, explained that the Cindacta-4's short circuit occurred during maintenance of the Contingency Generators Division, which are an integral part of the flight control center's electric power system.

According to the communiqué, commercial electrical power was cut off from 11:15 pm on Friday to 1:32 am the next day. The control center, however, only came back to life one hour later, at 2:30 am, while there were 17 flights being monitored.

While the Brazilian Air Force said there was no risk for the planes during the breakdown a flight controller, who asked for anonymity, disagrees and told Globo TV that airplanes were left overflying the Amazon blindly.

According to this controller, there was a risk of collision for two aircraft that were going to Belém, capital of Pará state. Another controller revealed that some of his colleagues panicked and a few started crying due to the situation.

For Jorge Botelho, president of the National Flight Protection Workers Union, Jorge Botelho, the latest failure just shows that the controllers were right when they denounced in the past the bad condition of the equipment they have to work with:

"All this shows," said Botelho, "that the controllers didn't lie. We never said that the equipment was rotten, but that it really has big problems."

Five flights that had already left Cumbica, São Paulo's International Airport bound to the US had to return due to electrical problem. Two American Airlines flights bound to the US, which had left from São Paulo made an unscheduled stopover at the Manaus International Airport.

One was going to Dallas, the other to Miami. They stayed about 5 hours in Manaus. The pilots, it has been reported, refused to fly over the Amazon without the control center guidance.

Flight 951, coming from New York to São Paulo, returned to the Unites States after two hours in the air after being unable to contact Brazil. The same happened to another American Airlines flight from Washington and still another from Orlando. Continental ended up delaying a flight while waiting for Brazil to repair its faulty control center.