VOLCANIC ASH AND THE PART 121 PILOT

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What is the guidance given to pilots at American Airlines regarding volcanic ash.

What is the preflight information given to pilots prior to their departure.
Guidance on Volcanic Ash

- “Flight in areas of known volcanic activity must be avoided unless specific procedures are in place for monitoring and communication.”
- …all SIGMECs and WSI flight plan guidance charts must be reviewed for current status of volcanic activity… (controlling information)
- …without internet a review of (text) SIGMECs in DECS (flight plan computer system) is sufficient...
“If volcanic ash is reported enroute, the planned flight should remain at least 60 nm clear of the area, and if possible, stay on the upwind side…”

“If volcanic ash is encountered exit as quickly as possible…” (180 degree turn)
Guidance

“Flights shall not be planned or operated to/from an airport when due to volcanic ash, one of the following applies to that airport:”

- ...it is within closed airspace
- ...it is closed by local authorities
- ...has volcanic ash reported in the body (not remarks) of the METAR
- ...it is within or forecast to be within a SIGMEC issued by WSI where ash exists or is forecasted to the surface
Textual guidance provided by WSI warning areas specific for American Airlines operations.

Static visible images (non scaling)

October 30, 2012 picture of “volcanic area number 5” in South America

Pink dot represents location of a volcano (not necessarily erupting at the time)

At this time ONE volcano here was …?
Conclusions

- Given the lack of information and our dependence upon the dispatcher, all AA pilots will err on the side of caution, especially during night or IMC operations.

- Keeping away from known plumes by 60 nm and in terminal areas is a must.

- “ALWAYS FLY AGGRESSIVELY SAFE!”