



Pike River Disaster

As we have just had the memorial service it is timely to reflect on events 12 months ago when the mine explosion first occurred. While Hokitika Airport has over time had many different aircraft visit, the Pike River Mine Disaster on 19 November 2010 saw many more aircraft than usual come and go. One of the first aircraft to arrive on November 20 bought in a team of gas analysts, who started their journey in the early hours of the morning, this was an international flight from Australia and the police were required to carry out the duties of Customs and MAF.



After a cup of coffee and some food the crew were transported to Greymouth by Helicopter.

On November 24 the Royal Australian Airforce arrived with the GAG Machine to help clear the mine gases. Followed by a robot which was for exploration of the mine conditions.





The first service for the Pike River Mine Disaster victims was held On 2 December 2010 at Greymouth. It was the largest event that the airport had handled in many years. At that time the airport was certified but was restricted to turnarounds of aircraft with seating capacity of less than 30 seats.



This meant that we were unable to facilitate the number of aircraft required for the memorial service. We applied under urgency, to CAA for consent to temporarily vary our certification conditions to allow the number and size of aircraft required for the transport of guests to the memorial service. This was granted and the consent was held over in the event that the miners bodies were able to be recovered. If this happened then there would have been an immediate need to once again have large capacity aircraft at Hokitika.



Just like this year, the weather was perfect and assisted in helping the days operations run smoothly. The Air New Zealand staff were supplemented with a ground marshaler from Christchurch who was experienced in handling, positioning and dispatching of the Q300 aircraft. As three Q300s sat on the tarmac for the duration of the service they had to be carefully positioned to allow for dispatch and the arrival of the regular scheduled Beech service.

One of the Air Nelson Q300s arrived from Auckland and required refueling before it returned later that afternoon. It was a slow process given that it had to be fueled from over the wing rather than being pumped in from below under much greater pressure as they do at larger airfields. We handled 10 turn-arounds during the day including the normal scheduled services with one engineering issue involving an Air National aircraft whose wheels would not retract on becoming airborne. There were no extra services required for this years service.

