



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ANTARCTICA TOUR OPERATORS

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A member organization founded in 1991 to advocate, promote and practice safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic

Medical Evacuation from South Pole

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE...

January 4, 2010, Providence, RI... One of Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions' (ALE) passengers fell ill at the South Pole, Thursday, December 31, 2009, while on a tourist visit to the Geographic South Pole. The ALE physician accompanying the visit managed the client with the assistance of the medical staff and facilities at the US Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station.

The group had left ALE's base camp at Patriot Hills, Antarctica about four hours earlier and was flown by ski-equipped aircraft to the South Pole. ALE guides and an ALE physician, who carried an extensive field medical pack, accompanied the group. The South Pole is at 9,300 ft (2,840 m) and was experiencing a temperature of -14 degrees F (-25 C) at the time. Because of the extreme weather conditions, elevation at the Pole and the remoteness of the location, the ALE medic also carried supplemental oxygen and full emergency camp equipment.

The group had flown to the South Pole to meet the Kaspersky Commonwealth Expedition, a group of seven women who had skied over 550 miles (900 km) from the edge of Antarctica to the South Pole, pulling sleds. Shortly after the two groups met for the first time in months and just as the group was to start a visit to the South Pole station, one of the members, an Australian national who resides in Hong Kong, became ill and requested medical assistance.

The patient's condition was considered serious and he was taken to the extensive medical suite at the South Pole station for treatment. It became apparent after some time that the patient would need to be evacuated out of Antarctica to a full hospital for further evaluation and treatment. ALE would have been able to accomplish this evacuation with its own aircraft and through its base camp. However, it was considered more prudent and medically preferable to use a pressurized aircraft for the evacuation. After considering the options, ALE came to the conclusion that its logistic support and medical capabilities at its remote Antarctic camp and the potential for weather delays in that area were less preferable in terms of optimizing the best outcome for the patient whose medical problems were considered by all to be of a serious nature. ALE therefore made a request to the National Science Foundation (NSF) to deploy one of NSF's aircraft for an emergency evacuation to Christchurch, New Zealand.

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NSF kindly agreed to this request and prepared one of its LC-130 aircraft, based at NSF's McMurdo Station, and equipped it with a highly experienced medical trauma team to fly to the South Pole to uplift the patient and evacuate him to Christchurch. ALE was greatly relieved and very much appreciated the agreement to provide the emergency medical evacuation.

Subsequently, an Air National Guard ski-equipped LC-130 was mobilized from McMurdo and arrived at the South Pole Amundsen Scott base at 0200 UTC on January 2, 2010. After the plane was refueled, the patient was put aboard and given into the expert care of the specialized emergency medical team on board. The aircraft flew back to McMurdo Sound Base for refueling and then continued on to Christchurch, where the patient was transferred to a local hospital for further medical tests and treatment. The patient's condition continued to stabilize, and he has now been released and is in transit back to his home in Hong Kong for further medical evaluation and care.

The medical evacuation was notable for its speed and efficiency from all involved in the effort.

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Press Notes

Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions LLC (ALE) is a US registered company based in Salt Lake City, Utah. ALE has been operating in the Antarctic since 2003, when it purchased the Antarctic tour operator, Adventure Network International (ANI). ANI operates a number of Antarctic tour programs, details at www.adventure-network.com. ALE and previously ANI have been operating Antarctic tours since the mid-1980s, flying passengers from Punta Arenas, Chile, to a naturally formed blue-ice runway in the Ellsworth Mountains, Antarctica, where it maintains a summer-only camp. ALE has taken hundreds of clients on successful visits to the South Pole. Medical support staff are based at the base camp and accompany flights to the South Pole.

Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station is operated by the US National Science Foundation, www.nsf.gov

IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate, promote and practice safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic. IAATO currently has 108 members worldwide. Members work together to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. Numerous operating procedures and guidelines have been adopted over the last 19 years that have proven to be successful methods for avoiding impacts, including site-specific guidelines, site selection criteria, passengers-to-staff ratios, limiting numbers of passengers ashore, boot-washing guidelines and the prevention of the transmission of alien organisms, wilderness etiquette, garbage policy, ship scheduling and vessel communications procedures, emergency medical evacuation procedures, emergency contingency plans, reporting procedures, marine wildlife watching guides, station visitation policies and more.

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