# Airlines threaten legal action against Heathrow over closure fallout



Airlines are considering legal action against Heathrow Airport unless a resolution can be reached regarding the financial repercussions stemming from the airport's closure on 1st September. Nigel Wicking, chief executive of the Heathrow Airline Operators' Committee, which represents over 90 airlines operating from the airport, indicated that the situation could escalate to legal proceedings if adequate compensation is not provided. Speaking to Sky News, Wicking remarked, "If we don't get good enough recourse and repayment in terms of the costs, then yes, there might be a case for legal action. I would hope not. But in some of these situations, that's the only course once you've gone through everything else."

The closure resulted from a fire at an electrical substation in Hayes, which led to significant disruption, affecting nearly 300,000 passengers and causing more than 1,350 flights to be cancelled or delayed. Experts estimate that the total costs incurred by airlines and suppliers could exceed £20 million, accounting for expenses associated with passenger accommodations, additional transportation, fuel, and other operational costs for the affected aircraft.

The fire ignited early on Friday morning, causing dramatic scenes as flames erupted from the substation, plumes of smoke visible in the London sky. Following the incident, former Labour Party leader Ed Miliband initiated an urgent investigation into the fire, collaborating with Ofgem and leveraging powers under the Energy Act to evaluate the situation thoroughly. "We are determined to properly understand what happened and what lessons need to be learned," Miliband stated, emphasising the government's commitment to improving energy resilience for critical national infrastructure.

Thomas Woldbye, Heathrow's chief executive, expressed his pride in the response of his staff during the crisis while addressing accusations that the airport had become a source of ridicule. In an interview with BBC Radio 4, he claimed, "Don't forget the situation was not created at Heathrow Airport. It was created outside the airport and we had to deal with the consequences." His management of the incident, however, has drawn scrutiny, as it was reported that Woldbye chose to return to bed while the fire raged. According to insiders cited by the Sunday Times, senior leaders were divided into command groups, and Woldbye's decision to get rest was deemed necessary for effective decision-making.

This response was met with scepticism, especially when it was revealed that his deputy Javier Echave made the call to close the airport while Woldbye slept. British Airways chief executive Sean Doyle and Virgin Atlantic’s Shai Weiss remained at their respective headquarters throughout the crisis. A Heathrow spokesperson countered claims of mismanagement, stating that proper crisis protocols were in place to ensure leadership effectiveness and passenger safety, leading to the reopening of the airport in less than 24 hours.

Operations returned to normal by Saturday morning, and the National Energy System Operator (Neso) has been tasked with compiling a report on the incident. This report is expected to be presented to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Ofgem within six weeks. While flights eventually resumed, questions linger about the airport's reliance on backup power and the protocols in place to prevent such disruptions. Some analysts have underscored concerns regarding the vulnerability of critical infrastructure after the incident, especially noting that Heathrow, as the busiest airport in Europe, should not be susceptible to single-point failures.

The ongoing investigations include assessments from counter-terrorism police, though officials from Scotland Yard have stated they are not treating the incident as suspicious at this time. A Heathrow spokesperson maintained that the situation was unprecedented and highlighted the swift recovery of operations within a short timeframe, insisting that lessons will be learned from the incident to bolster future infrastructure resilience.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/uk-heathrow-airport-closure-global-flight-disruptions-impact-9-11-aviation-crisis-13873355.html> - This article corroborates the disruption caused by Heathrow's closure, including the number of flights affected and the impact on passengers worldwide. It details how the closure resulted from a fire at a nearby electrical substation.
* <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250321-heathrow-closure-could-cost-millions-disrupt-flights-for-days> - This report indicates that Heathrow's closure could have significant financial implications for airlines and disrupt flights for several days, aligning with the article's mention of potential legal action due to financial losses.
* <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/uk-heathrow-airport-closure-global-flight-disruptions-impact-9-11-aviation-crisis-13873355.html> - Heathrow's crisis response and the involvement of major airlines like British Airways and United Airlines in rerouting or cancelling flights is detailed here, supporting claims about the extent of flight disruptions.
* <https://fortune.com/2025/03/22/heathrow-airportfully-operational-blackout-shutdown-airline-flight-delays> - This article confirms that Heathrow returned to full operational status shortly after the incident, reflecting the speedy recovery of the airport's operations as mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news> - BBC News often covers in-depth analyses of major incidents like the Heathrow Airport fire, potentially offering additional insights into the crisis management strategies employed by Heathrow and airlines during the closure.