

# A flight of hope

## Boeing, Shenzhen Airlines, relief agencies deliver supplies after China earthquake

By SUSAN BIRKHOLTZ

**A**n 8.0-magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan Province in China on May 12, one of that country's worst recent natural disasters. Since then, nearly 9,000 aftershocks have been detected in the quake-hit areas. The first deadly quake affected more than 45 million people. An estimated 70,000 have lost their lives, and thousands more are injured or missing.

Boeing and its employees have been quick to respond, with contributions totaling more than \$500,000 to date—and an interesting idea. Would the company's China-based airline customers scheduled to fly their new airplanes away in late May and June agree to transport much-needed medical supplies for the quake-ravaged victims?

The answer was a resounding “Yes,” and the Flight of Hope effort was born.

“We felt that bringing together relief agencies and our airline customers to make this happen was something tangible that Boeing could do to help the survivors of the China earthquake,” said Patrice Mingo, director, Strategic Programs, Boeing Global Corporate Citizenship.

Boeing has collaborated with relief agencies and airline customers in the past to deliver humanitarian aid to areas around the world. But this effort was far more challenging in terms of the short time period and the urgency of the need. “The level of effort and collaboration exhibited by so many different parts of the company was amazing. For me, it showed the power of ‘one Boeing’ in action,” said Mingo.

The complexity of bringing all the right partners together and getting the right information



To support relief efforts after the recent earthquake in China, Boeing employees on May 24 loaded nearly three tons of medical supplies into a new Shenzhen Airlines 737-800 after the airplane was delivered at Boeing Field in Seattle. ALAN MARTS PHOTO

to and from the right people in the right places was daunting at times. But the group—which, besides Mingo, includes Boeing China President David Wang, representatives from Boeing Commercial Airplanes Sales, and Puget Sound GCC focals with previous experience with humanitarian flights—persevered.

It turned out the easiest part was getting the airline customers to participate, with Shenzhen Airlines being among the first of several China-based airline customers that eagerly agreed to work with Boeing. Mercy Corps and Medical Teams International (MTI) came on board quickly after that.

“What was interesting was that our collaborative mindset was shared by our nonprofit partners,” said Mingo. As luck would have it, MTI had medical supplies available but no way to distribute them in China. Meanwhile, Mercy Corps had no supplies to transport, but they had a nonprofit partner in China who could receive the goods and deliver them where needed. “So the fit between MTI’s ability to provide the supplies and Mercy Corps’ connections to get them where needed was a collaboration within a collaboration—a happy surprise,” Mingo said.

### THE FIRST FLIGHT

On May 24, the collaboration among the partners paid off. A new Shenzhen Airlines 737-800 left Boeing Field in Seattle carrying more than three tons of medical supplies.

The supplies eventually were transferred to a domestic Shenzhen flight and taken to Chengdu airport, which is nearest the quake-affected area, on May 27. Upon its arrival, the

Mercy Corps nonprofit partner unloaded the supplies and began delivering them within the earthquake region.

“This wonderful effort, made possible by Shenzhen’s graciousness in offering its new airplane, came together quickly because of our collective determination to help the survivors,” said Anne Roosevelt, Boeing GCC vice president.

“We’re grateful for this opportunity to bring hope and healing to those who have lost everything and are suffering,” MTI President Bas Vanderzalm said. Neal Keny-Guyer, Mercy Corps chief executive, agreed: “In disasters the size of the China earthquake, rapid response saves thousands of lives. Boeing’s help rushing these medicines to China means Mercy Corps can get them immediately to those who need them most.”

Roosevelt noted that Mingo and the Flight of Hope team are investigating additional opportunities, with Shenzhen and other airlines, to deliver more supplies to China within the next month.

“Since the first flight on May 24, I have received e-mails from all over the globe with congratulations to Boeing on the creativity of our plan to aid earthquake sufferers in China,” Roosevelt said. “From David’s team in China to the people in the BCA Sales organization, the GCC focals who coordinated the shipment, and the communicators who worked over the holiday weekend to get out the news—all truly demonstrated the power of ‘one Boeing.’” ■

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