New ash studies needed to 'limit air traffic chaos'

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The Eyjafjallajokull volcano continues to billow smoke and ash during an eruption on April 17. Better research models of how ash is dispersed would greatly reduce the air traffic havoc wreaked in Europe since an Icelandic volcano began spewing a giant cloud of the toxic dust last week, geophysicist Magnus Tumi Gudmundsson told AFP.

Better research models of how ash is dispersed would greatly reduce the air traffic havoc wreaked in Europe since an Icelandic volcano began spewing a giant cloud of the toxic dust last week, an expert said on Sunday.

"Just because airspace is being closed due to the ash cloud does not mean there is actually ash in the air in all these areas," Icelandic geophysicist and civil protection advisory Magnus Tumi Gudmundsson told AFP.

"Very high safety standards are being used," he pointed out, insisting that "intensive work is needed to improve the models" used to predict how ash is dispersed.

"If you have better data, you can significantly reduce the restrictions ... to maybe just one quarter of the shutdowns we have today," he said.

About 30 countries had by Sunday closed or restricted their airspace, with the cloud of fine mineral dust particles from Iceland now extending from the Arctic Circle in the north to the French Mediterranean coast in the south and from Spain into Russia.

Justifying the widespread airport closures aviation officials have explained that airplane engines could become clogged up and stop working if they tried to fly through the ash.

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