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Little merriment over more flights at Mather

By Molly Dugan -- Bee Staff Writer

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Some Folsom residents are worried about plans to increase the number of air cargo flights at Mather Airport through the end of the year.

Starting this week, UPS plans to add up to seven air cargo flights per day to handle the holiday rush while DHL, a shipping company, makes no more than one additional flight per day.

The average number of air cargo arrivals and departures per day during most of the year is 22 on Tuesday through Thursday, 15 on Friday, nine on Monday, six on Saturday and two on Sunday.

Mather Airport has seen an increase in air cargo flights during the holidays since 1995, when shipping companies first began to use the facility.

This holiday season, the airport won't have as many flights as in previous years, said Rob Leonard, chief operating officer of the Sacramento County Airport System. UPS had eight additional holiday flights per day in 2003 and 2004.

"We've actually had more intense use before when we had the U.S. Postal Service operating out there," Leonard said.

But some Folsom residents say the noise from the air cargo flights is disturbing most of the year and worsens in December.

"In years past, the holiday rush has been very noticeable," said Bill Bryant, a Folsom resident. "Instead of getting woken up three or four times per night, we're getting woken up five or six."

Glen Rickelton, airport noise officer, said most of the additional holiday flights will arrive and depart during the day, however.

"People are much more sensitive to the late night and early morning flights," he said. "There is going to be more aircraft, and there is going to be more noise - but mostly in the daytime."

Since shipping companies often use larger air cargo planes to carry more goods during the holidays, nearby residents could hear louder aircraft overhead, Rickelton said.

Folsom and El Dorado Hills residents long have complained about the noise from air cargo planes at Mather Airport.

Leonard said noise levels have decreased, because the airport has started using continuous descent approach, a method for pilots operating the aircraft. The procedure reduces noise on the ground by managing throttle settings, flaps and landing-gear deployment.

"We're seeing the airlines using the (continuous descent) with increasing frequency," Leonard said. "With the holiday season, it's a matter of getting word to the pilots about the (continuous descent)."

Airport officials have launched a campaign this holiday season to get the word out to pilots, many of whom don't normally use Mather Airport, Leonard said.

Folsom Mayor Steve Miklos isn't impressed.

"It's not as loud," he said, "but it's still waking up people."

Miklos added that the aircraft noise is always worse during December.

"We get this every year," he said. "And every year, they wake up all of us."

Noise concerns will be addressed in an environmental analysis due in 2007 as part of Mather Airport's master plan.

Residents are encouraged to call the airport noise hotline at (916) 874-0800 to report aircraft noise.

Residents can track flights using an interactive map at sacramentotracks.com.

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