

## **Rockford airport's record-setting cargo takes technical dip**

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ROCKFORD -

On the strength of UPS's expanded sorting hub, Chicago Rockford International Airport just finished a record year in cargo service.

In 2007, 1.47 billion pounds of cargo landed at the airport, up 6 percent from the previous year. The previous record was 1.39 billion pounds in 2005.

UPS was the major reason, bringing in 1.33 billion of those pounds, a 7.4 percent increase from its 2006 level.

The growth was expected: UPS finished a \$25 million expansion in 2006 to allow the hub to handle 121,000 packages an hour. The hub is UPS's second-biggest and serves 60 percent of the U.S. population, 80 percent during the holiday season.

"Our plan is to continue to maximize the Rockford air facility, and we fully anticipate continuing to grow," UPS spokeswoman Christine Hand said. "With our heavy air-freight facility continuing to be new, we expect that to grow, too."

The airport's other carriers, BAX Global and DHL, saw slight decreases in 2007.

BAX Global had 102.6 million pounds in landed weight, down 5.4 percent. DHL had 26.3 million pounds in landed weight, down 1.2 percent.

The airport was the 22nd-busiest for cargo in the U.S. at the end of 2006, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. The FAA won't release 2007 rankings until the summer, but the airport could crack the top 20.

The airport's cargo numbers actually went down 13.9 percent in December 2007 compared with December 2006, only the second month of the year that decreased.

The decrease was mostly because of UPS, but Hand said it wasn't because of a slowdown. She said the likely reason was that cargo traffic in December 2006 was unusually high because of planes diverted here from other airports in bad weather.

"Rockford is constructed to be a backup facility for our other airport facilities, so sometimes that will increase the numbers," she said. "We weren't down in any of our measurements. I think the anomaly was 2006."

Eric Voyles, vice president of national business development for the Rockford Area Economic Development Council, agreed that the December decrease was a blip. He said the airport's general trajectory is up, and that's a good sign during increasingly difficult economic times.

It helps that airport officials are courting other cargo carriers and hope to bring one or two here this year, Voyles said. That will diversify the cargo operations and protect the airport from a downturn.

But he doesn't expect UPS to slow down.

“UPS is a very strong corporate citizen, a very good corporate competitor in the package delivery industry. Historically, their business here continues to grow.”

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