

Airlines asked to give better warnings

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THE Consumer Council has urged airlines to give better warnings to passengers about flight delays caused by typhoons.

The call came after thousands of passengers were stranded during Tropical Storm Becky and again yesterday during Typhoon Dot.

"Anxious consumers unable to obtain precise information on flights are virtually bound to leave for the airport in anticipation of a scheduled arrival or departure, even if typhoon

Signal 8 is hoisted," a council spokesman said.

"This may pose extreme hardship and endanger personal safety, so the provision of better channels of communication on flight movements and transport services will go a long way to relieve the anxiety."

Last night, one traveller, Pakistani architect Akeel Bilgram, said a central single hotline should be established for information.

He said: "I've been waiting six hours for my flight to Manila but they still told me to come at the original time. They must have known

there was going to be a delay. It could have been handled a lot better."

Thousands of people were stuck as four flights - including two arrivals - were cancelled, one incoming plane was diverted and 30 were delayed up to 5.30 pm.

More than 100 people were scheduled to leave on an Air New Zealand flight that was cancelled. Most passengers were contacted, but about 15 turned up at the check-in desk. They were told they would not be provided with overnight accommodation.

Rene de Wit, marketing manager for a New Zealand foods firm, said there could have been chaos.

"They told me the hotels were all full and that I would have to find accommodation myself or sleep in the airport.

"I phoned early in the morning to check if the flight was still on and was picked up from the hotel.

"It wasn't until I arrived a couple of hours before the plane was due to leave I found out it was cancelled."

Alex Mak, an Air New Zealand representative, said the majority of passengers were contacted.

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