

Southwest Airlines plans to increase winter staffing and improve tech

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Southwest Airlines' CEO said the company will increase winter staffing and equipment to help avoid a repeat of mass cancellations over the year-end holidays that cost the company millions of dollars and stranded tens of thousands of travelers.

In a filing ahead of an investor conference, Southwest said it continues to expect a loss in the first quarter after a revenue hit of as much as \$350 million resulting from the fallout of the holiday mess last year, when it canceled more than 16,000 flights during the last 10 days of 2022, drawing criticism from Washington.

Southwest said it expects unit costs, excluding fuel, to be up as much as 6.5% year over year this quarter, higher than a January forecast of an increase of no more than 4%.

The company will purchase more equipment to deice planes and bolster staffing levels. Bitter temperatures during a series of storms before Christmas last year limited how much time crews were able to spend outside, Southwest said.

The airline will also improve technology to better predict how long deicing could take and has improved one of its scheduling platforms to ensure adequate staffing for flights when things go wrong.

“We understand the root causes that led to the holiday disruption, and we’re validating our internal review with the third-party assessment. Now, we expect to mitigate the risk of an event of this magnitude ever happening again,” CEO Bob Jordan said in a news release. “Work is well underway implementing action items to prepare for next winter—with some items already completed.”

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