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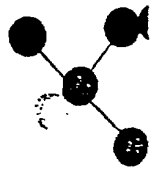
POOR AIR QUALITY POSES THREAT TO AIRLINE PASSENGERS. SMOKING BAN INEFFECTIVE

(WASHINGTON, June 22) -- Millions of airline passengers face a potential health threat from the air they breathe aboard commercial aircraft, an indoor air specialist testified at a congressional hearing today.

Gray Robertson, president of ACVA Atlantic Inc., which pioneered the analysis, diagnosis and treatment of indoor air pollution, told members of the House Public Works and Transportation Subcommittee on Aviation that the cabin air on most airplanes is becoming increasingly polluted as airlines attempt to cut costs by decreasing ventilation.

Robertson also said the temporary smoking ban on flights of two hours or less, which expires next year, fails to address the real source of the problem.

"In the vast majority of cases, poor indoor air quality is caused by inadequate ventilation, often coupled with poor filtration. In an airplane, as in any enclosed space, this forces passengers to breathe air contaminated by a variety



of pollutants, many of which can have serious health effects," said Robertson, who based his findings on a review of all reported data and reports on airline air quality.

Pollutants that have been found at high levels on planes include carbon dioxide, fibers and dust, fumes and vapors from fuel and other sources, ozone, and a variety of bacteria, fungi and viruses. These substances can cause sore eyes, scratchy throats, headaches, fatigue and respiratory symptoms.

Passenger complaints about such symptoms prompted the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council to review airline air quality and safety. Its 1986 report found that 11 percent of the flights had violated FAA standards for ozone, with some levels more than eight times higher than recommended. The report also found carbon dioxide levels to exceed recommended limits.

"Ironically, there has been no evidence of excessive levels of carbon monoxide, airborne particulates or nicotine," Robertson said, "all of which have been linked to tobacco smoke as a source."

The NAS report also revealed ventilation rates in the economy section of airplanes to be considerably lower than recommended industry standards for buildings. Passengers flying first class are more likely to receive adequate fresh air.

(more)

Although the airlines argue that reducing ventilation saves money on fuel, Robertson testified that the cost of providing adequate ventilation is relatively small. Increasing ventilation to the recommended rate on a typical five-hour flight aboard a 747 with 400 passengers would cost only an extra 60 cents per passenger, or the cost of one additional plane ticket overall, Robertson said.

Robertson's recommendations to the committee included:

- Maximize ventilation rates;
- If airplanes are designed to run on recycled air, enforce effective air filtration;
- Enforce compliance through inspection and monitoring.

"According to all available data, a smoking ban has not achieved and will not achieve clean indoor air on commercial airliners," Robertson concluded. "If the goal of the committee is to ensure a clean and healthy environment for airline passengers, improving ventilation standards and systems will go immeasurably further than attempts to react to any individual pollutant."

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