

**ENVIRONMENTAL TOBACCO SMOKE  
AND AIRLINE CABIN AIR QUALITY**

**NAS Findings**

In August 1986, a committee of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) released a review of existing scientific literature on airline cabin air quality. In releasing the report, the panel concluded that "air quality on board commercial airliners warrants concern," but conceded that "empirical evidence is lacking in quality and quantity," and that "the dearth of pertinent data limits conclusions about the potential for adverse health effects to no more than estimates. Much more research must be conducted before risks can be accurately measured."

Despite this "dearth" of data, the committee offered 21 recommendations, the most controversial of which was to ban smoking on all domestic commercial flights.

**DOT Rejects Ban, Calls for Study**

The Department of Transportation, noting that the absence of data suggested a need for further study, rejected the smoking ban. Subsequently, in testimony before the House Aviation Subcommittee, the Coalition on Smoking OR Health acknowledged that neither the NAS study nor the Surgeon General's 1986 Report on Involuntary Smoking "directly assessed health effects for persons exposed in airplanes," and that "it is very difficult at this time to rank different environments in some sort of quantitative or semiquantitative way with regard to the extent of exposure" to tobacco smoke.

Nevertheless, Congress in 1987 passed legislation banning smoking on flights of two hours or less. The ban will expire in April 1990. One commercial carrier, Northwest Airlines, has implemented a total in-flight smoking ban.

**New Research Does Not Support Ban**

Since the release of the NAS report, additional research has been conducted on cabin air quality in general, and environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) specifically. A summary of the three most recent reports, in addition to summaries of the studies conducted prior to 1986, is attached.

The recent reports further demonstrate that in-flight smoking bans are unnecessary:

- A 1989 study by the National Cancer Institute -- widely touted as justification for a total smoking ban -- in fact reveals that nonsmoking passengers experience only minimal exposure to nicotine.
- A 1988 review of existing scientific literature by an environmental scientist shows that the data do not support airline smoking bans, or claims of health hazards posed by ETS in airplanes.
- An extensive 1987 study confirms that the use of smoking and nonsmoking sections adequately reduces nicotine exposure to nonsmokers.

**ETS: An Issue of Comfort, not Health**

Anti-smoking activists are attempting to renew the legislated two-hour ban or to expand it to cover all domestic airline flights, based on claims that nonsmoking passengers or crew are exposed to hazardous or unacceptable levels of ETS in airline cabins. But the facts show that their argument is based on emotion, conjecture and politics rather than scientific data.

In-flight ETS is an issue of comfort, not health. Because some airline passengers are annoyed by cigarette smoke, airlines offer the option of smoking or nonsmoking seating on flights where smoking is not banned by the government. There is no evidence suggesting a need for further smoking restrictions.