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for file*

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July 30, 1993

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Members of the Executive Committee

FROM: Samuel D. Chilcote, Jr. *Sam*

RE: Hearing on Airline Cabin Air Quality

Pam Touchstone, a United Airlines flight attendant from Arlington, VA, with more than nine years of service, on Thursday told the Subcommittee on Technology, Environment and Aviation of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology that she and her colleagues often experience dizziness, nausea, headaches and other health effects from poor aircraft cabin air. She has become more aware of air quality complaints since the 1990 ban on smoking on most domestic flights and suggested to the Subcommittee that air quality complaints prior to the ban were "disguised by smoke."

Touchstone, who testified in support of ventilation standards for cabin air and requiring airlines to run their air packs at full capacity to increase the amount of fresh air, was the lead witness in the first of two panels of witnesses testifying on airline cabin air quality. Other witnesses included representatives from the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

In addition to Subcommittee Chairman Tim Valentine (D-NC), nine other Members attended all or part of the hearing, including Reps. Tom Lewis (R-FL), Tim Roemer (D-IN), Jay Inslee (D-WA), Nathan Deal (D-GA), Peter Barca (D-WI), Connie Morella (R-MD), Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD), Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and Martin Hoke (R-OH). Media coverage was relatively heavy, and included NBC News, Newsweek, Cox Broadcasting and National Public Radio. The Today Show and Fox Morning News that morning also had carried reports on the hearing.

A witness list and copies of all written testimony are enclosed.

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In his opening statement, Chairman Valentine noted that there appears to have been little examination of cabin air quality since smoking was banned in 1990. Since then, Valentine said, "U.S. airlines have reduced the amount of fresh air circulated in passenger cabins in order to lower fuel consumption." He also charged that during the same period, "the Federal Aviation Administration has paid very little attention to the problems of air quality on passenger airlines."

Discussions of cabin air quality during the 1980s, Valentine noted, focused almost entirely on smoking. "At that time, I noted that the issue should be addressed in a more comprehensive manner. I argued then, and still argue today, that we should review all aspects of air quality so that the guidelines that we adopt truly address the entire problem." Valentine also referenced the 1989 Department of Transportation study of cabin air quality that raised a variety of concerns, most of which "seemed to have been generally lost in the excitement over the conclusion of the smoking issue."

Testifying with Touchstone on the first panel were Dee Maki, President of the Association of Flight Attendants, Alan Hinman, Director of the National Center for Prevention Services at the Centers for Disease Control, and Niren Nagda, a vice president of ICF Incorporated and the principal investigator on the 1989 Department of Transportation (DoT) study of cabin air quality.

Maki joined Touchstone in calling for a national tracking system that will allow crew members and passengers to report complaints that may be associated with poor cabin air. The AFA President linked poor cabin air quality to airline efforts to conserve fuel by recirculating air. Noting that FAA regulations on aircraft ventilation are vague and considerably less strict than ASHRAE standards, she urged the FAA to require that airlines operate all of their air packs at full capacity and to tighten regulation of aircraft ventilation.

The CDC's Hinman reported on several investigations concerning the transmission of tuberculosis in airline cabins. He told the Subcommittee that the agency to date has no data that would indicate an increased risk of transmission of infectious disease among airline passengers compared to persons in other confined environments, although he said there is some evidence suggesting the possibility of TB transmission among flight attendants.

"The problem of smoking on international flights" led off Hinman's discussion of overall cabin air quality. CDC hopes the International Civil Aviation Resolution calling for a smoking ban on all flights by 1996 "will culminate in a general policy

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prohibiting smoking on all commercial airline flights worldwide," he said. Hinman also told the Subcommittee that the National Institutes for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has begun research to assess whether there are health risks associated with the air cabin environment. He referenced a 10-year FAA/NIOSH study begun in 1991 to examine the effect of aircraft exposures, cabin air pressure, ETS, and other parameters on the reproductive health of female flight attendants.

Nagda's testimony focused on issues other than ETS that were raised in the 1989 cabin air quality study for DoT. Although the study found low levels of carbon monoxide, ozone, fungi and bacteria, Nagda told the Subcommittee average carbon dioxide levels were 50 percent higher than ASHRAE criteria. High levels of carbon dioxide, he noted, is an indication of inadequate ventilation of the airliner cabin. Until additional research has been done on links between reduced ventilation and disease transmission, eye and upper airway irritation and headaches, he told the Subcommittee that "it would be prudent to increase airliner cabin ventilation rates whenever and wherever possible."

Most of the testimony of the FAA panel was devoted to the agency's research and development programs. Witnesses included John Burt, Executive Director for System Development; John Zugschwert, a vice president at Textron and a member of the FAA R&D Advisory Committee; and former FAA Administrator Najeeb Halaby. Only Burt addressed cabin air quality, and then but briefly when he said that the FAA has found no indication from the research conducted to date that cabin ventilation is a factor in spreading disease. He also said the FAA believes that current regulations on ventilation of passenger and crew compartments are sufficient to protect passenger and worker health, and that the airlines are meeting these standards.

In questioning, Reps. Valentine, Lewis and Hoke all expressed frustration at the FAA's refusal either to set a stricter ventilation standard for airline cabins or to pursue further investigations. When Burt said that the FAA had spent 10 years studying cabin air quality and would continue to "monitor" the issue, Lewis and Hoke suggested that if the FAA did not voluntarily undertake additional research, the Subcommittee would direct the agency to do so in its reauthorization bill.

Enclosures

SDC:sms

cc: The Members of the Management Committee
TI Senior Staff

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