



FIRE SAFETY: ANOTHER REASON FOR SMOKE-FREE AIRLINE FLIGHTS WORLDWIDE

Safety, like health, is a major concern that arises in the context of smoking on airplanes. Smoking and the use of matches and cigarette lighters in the pressurized confines and of the airline cabin pose a serious threat to the safety of passengers and flight crews on international airline flights. A carelessly discarded cigarette is suspected as having caused the inflight fire on board Air Canada flight 797 which resulted in 23 deaths on June 2, 1983. On flights on which smoking is permitted, flight attendants report that it is typical for passengers who smoke to walk and stand in the airplane aisles with lighted cigarettes, flicking burning embers on the aircraft's carpet. Flight attendants also report that passengers sometimes fall asleep with lit cigarettes in hand, occasionally dropping them between the fuselage and the seat, resulting in seat cushion fires or worse. Flight attendants have been burned by carelessly held cigarettes while passing through the aisle. When alcohol consumption is added to the equation, the safety hazards posed by the frequent lighting of matches and lighters and the smoking of cigarettes are compounded as passengers become less cautious in handling their cigarettes. Lit cigarettes also pose a serious hazard in the event of decompression when supplemental oxygen becomes available at all passenger seats.

A Smoking Ban on All International Airline Flights, When Combined with the Installation of Tamper-Proof Airline Lavatory Smoke Detectors, Will Reduce the Risk of Fire

According to the National Aviation Safety Data Center (NASDC) of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), of the 223 incidents involving smoke and/or fumes in the cockpit and cabin and fires and/or explosions inflight or on the ground reported as having occurred on domestic U.S. carriers between January 1, 1988, and March 20, 1991, only one involved smoking in the lavatory. In that incident, the lavatory smoke detector was activated, but no fire occurred. The NASDC records cover the entire period during which airline smoking bans have been in effect in the United States. (Congress first enacted a prohibition on smoking on all domestic commercial passenger airline flights of two hours or less, effective April 23, 1988, and, later, a similar prohibition effecting virtually all domestic commercial passenger flights, including some of well over six hours in duration, effective February 25, 1990.)

According to *The Airliner Cabin Environment: Air Quality and Safety*, a report issued by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences in 1986, the FAA Civil Aeromedical Institute Cabin Safety Data Bank between 1980 and 1985 recorded 138 incidents involving smoke or fumes in aircraft cabins or cockpits, of which five involved the use of cigarettes or lighters in the airline cabin. During the period cited, smoking was permitted on all domestic airline flights.

While the Chairman of the Accident Survival Committee of the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) recently expressed concern that the airline smoking ban might actually have resulted in an increase in the number of fire-related incidents in airline lavatories, the NASDC records cited above suggest that the domestic airline smoking ban has resulted in greater fire safety. At the same time, the ALPA spokesman reaffirmed his association's support for the airline smoking ban and recommended that lavatory smoke detectors be constructed and placed in the aircraft in a way that prevents passengers from damaging or destroying them. The Coalition on Smoking OR Health believes this is a good recommendation and that the FAA should amend its regulations to require tamper-proof smoke detectors.

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