

STATEMENT OF THE
JOINT COUNCIL OF FLIGHT ATTENDANT UNIONS
presented to the
COMMITTEE ON AIRLINER CABIN AIR QUALITY
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

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GOOD MORNING GENTLEMEN:

My name is Margaret Brennan and I am Vice President for the Independent Union of Flight Attendants (IUFA). I am here this morning representing the Joint Council of Flight Attendant Unions. The Joint Council is composed of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA) representing Flight Attendants at American Airlines; the Independent Federation of Flight Attendants (IFFA) representing Flight Attendants at TransWorld Airlines; the Independent Union of Flight Attendants (IUFA) representing Flight Attendants at Pan American Airlines; Transport Workers Local 553, AFL-CIO, representing Flight Attendants at Eastern Airlines; the Union of Flight Attendants (UFA) representing Flight Attendants at Continental; and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers of America, representing Flight Attendants at Northwest Orient Airlines, Wien, Air Alaska Airlines, Cascade Airlines, World, Pacific Southwest, and Capitol Airlines. Together we represent over 35,000 Flight Attendants in the United States.

We are here today because of our concerns about the environment which you have been commissioned to study. It is the environment in which we work every day. Therefore, we believe that we can be of help to you.

It is our understanding that the purpose of this meeting is simply to seek information regarding cabin air quality, i.e., "what is out there" for your review, so that you can decide what needs to be done. We want to help you identify and locate

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some of the information that is available and work that has already been done. We also have some information of our own and resources with which we can provide you further information.

The area in which we can be most helpful and in which we are the experts will be in providing the information on the individual carrier's safety procedures and training regarding fire extinguishers, the availability and the quality of safety equipment and emergency breathing equipment. There is one point I would like to make at this time for clarification. Under the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations, each carrier develops its own training program. The program is then submitted for approval to the FAA. If the program is approved it then becomes the training program by which that carrier must abide. This does mean that there are inconsistencies in training programs and procedures. We do believe that it is important for you to be aware that there are different procedures and training at each airline. We have asked each of our individual members to submit what the training programs for the carriers that they represent are and that information will be forthcoming to you as we receive it.

The information which we have at this time regarding the quality of air in the aircraft cabin primarily consists of written complaints from Flight Attendants. Some of these complaints have been put into survey form covering a number of years. A copy of one of the surveys has been provided for you already.

We will be submitting further surveys as they come in. Some of us have also participated, both collectively and as individuals, in a study done by Dr. James Cone of San Francisco General Hospital, who was assisted by Mr. Buck Cameron, Industrial Hygienist. Included in his work were breathing exercises by Flight Attendants involving the Wright Peak Flow Meter and were taken before, during, and 48 hours after flights. More information is still coming in from these studies. It is our understanding that you are aware of the work of Dr. Cone and that it has been made available to you.

We also know air measurements have been taken by various carriers. The most well known air quality measurement taken by a carrier in the aircraft was Eastern Airlines during what was called their "Red Sweat Scare". That information is available from Eastern but it is not available through their Flight Attendant Union. The names of the physicians involved in this study are Drs. Miller and Hudson at Eastern Airlines.

Through the years we have become increasingly concerned about our working environment, particularly because we are not covered by OSHA's environmental exposure standards and the FAA has seen fit only to set exposure standards for ozone. Contributing to the exposure problem is the fact that Flight Attendants are staying on the job longer, thus have a greater awareness of and susceptibility to job related illnesses. It is our understanding that some of our members have filed Workmen's Compensation claims

and have won or partially won them, based on problems arising from poor aircraft cabin environments. I am including information about one particular battle being fought by a flight attendant at Pan Am whose name is Terry Singleton. We will try to obtain permission to provide you with further information from other flight attendants who have had problems.

Trends we have noticed fall primarily into the upper respiratory problem category. Medical groundings for colds have become more frequent and longer lasting. Other examples of complaints we have had include: headaches, burning eyes, fatigue, lack of air, shortness of breath, impaired breathing, sore throats, deep clenching chest pain when taking a deep breath, blood in the throat, coughs, nausea, faintness, lethargy, sinus pressures, nosebleeds and blocked ears. Many of our members have simply written of their complaints to us or to their carriers to be documented. A few have continued with personal physicians and have had complaints verified by objective medical diagnoses. We are also seeking permission to provide this information to you.

Other concerns that we have are the lack of humidity in the air, the ratio of clean, breathable air in the cabin environment, as well as the pollutants and pathogens in the aircraft. Chemicals used in cleaning the aircraft and in materials used in the cabin itself could be hazardous to our health. This is especially true if exposure occurs over a long period of time. The ventilation

systems in the cabin and the accumulation of pathogens in them are cause for alarm. We also have concerns about practices of aircraft flying without all ventilation systems being operational. This is a very common practice in the aviation industry. We admit that this does not create serious problems with a light passenger load, but with deregulation light loads are almost nonexistent. It has been our experience that reports filed with carriers relating to these problems and concerns do not carry much weight. The Air Transport Association has stated that the following conditions must be met before complaints can be considered by the carriers:

- 1) that nonaviation control groups be queried;
- 2) that examinations by competent physicians be made;
- 3) that attempts be made to correlate in-flight symptoms with smoking habits, extra-curricular activities, medical histories or health conditions.

All of this must be done before our complaints will be considered to exist by the Air Transport Association. We would like to offer at this time as much assistance as possible to this committee in complying with the preconditions as set forth by the Air Transport Association if the committee also feels that these are reasonable preconditions.

To this end, we can offer this committee free access to the airplanes. That is to say, if on-board testing is needed which requires little or no training, our members can take samples

for you and return them to you. At the minimum, we urge that some sampling be done in this study. Our members would also be willing to participate in any survey which this committee might find helpful. Our members would also be willing to participate in any breathing studies this committee might wish to do. We do not mean to seem to limit our concerns only to ourselves and not to our passengers. We are as concerned for their health as that of our members. However, as Flight Attendants we do spend more time in the aircraft cabin than do our passengers -- it is our total working environment. What we feel we have to offer you are the best "guinea pigs" this committee could want. We and our members would be willing to help this committee in any way that you deem appropriate.

Thank you.