

bl Airlines

TOBACCO OBSERVER

NORTHWEST BANS IN-FLIGHT SMOKING, FEDERAL RESTRICTIONS GROW STRONGER

Late last month, Northwest Airlines announced that beginning April 23, it no longer will accommodate those North American travelers who wish to smoke while they fly.

Northwest's smoking ban, which applies to all flights between points in Alaska, Canada, the continental U.S., Mexico, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, but not on routes to Hawaii, Asia and Europe, goes beyond a new federal law, effective the same day, banning smoking on domestic flights of two hours or less.

OTHER ISSUES DESERVE HIGHER PRIORITY

Tobacco Institute spokespersons criticized the Northwest decision to ignore the estimated 30 percent of the flying public who smoke, and suggested that the carrier's action was intended to divert public attention away from passenger concerns about its safety record, flight delays, lost baggage, oversales and other problems.

"If Northwest is truly attempting to satisfy concerns about service, any number of issues deserves higher priority than smoking," TI said.

Northwest's executive vice president for marketing, A.B. Magary, said the total ban "is a response to our customers' and employees' requests."

But TI noted that Northwest has been beleaguered over the last year by record numbers of consumer complaints, published reports of employee dissatisfaction and government citations for safety and maintenance violations.

According to government records, consumer complaints against Northwest lodged with the Department of Transportation (DOT) skyrocketed 1,418 percent from 1986 to 1987. In fact, the federal Air Travel Consumer Report summarizing 1987 performance shows that the carrier was the source of the second most passenger complaints—nearly 7,000—during the year.

Problems related to smoking, raised by anti-smokers or smokers not allowed to

smoke, accounted for less than three percent of these complaints.

"Since the airline's customers complain with such great frequency, it's no wonder Northwest is attempting to create a smoke-screen," TI said. "Unfortunately, for smokers and nonsmokers alike, that's all it is—a smokescreen that does nothing to address the problems passengers feel are seriously wrong with Northwest."

ALTERNATIVES

Northwest's policy will affect the 30 percent of its flights that last more than two hours. On these routes, Northwest faces stiff competition from other major airlines.

"Smokers, fortunately, have alternative airlines that welcome their business and,

if the federal complaint record is any indication, provide better service," TI said.

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Smokers, register your complaints with Northwest today! Telephone or write to:

A.B. Magary
Vice President-Marketing
Northwest Airlines
St. Paul International Airport
St. Paul, Minnesota 55111
Telephone: (612) 726-2111

Send copies of your letters to the other airlines and let them know you're pleased that they will continue to accommodate you as a smoker. Also, share your views with the Department of Transportation, Office of Consumer Affairs, 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590.

CABIN AIR QUALITY: WHAT'S THE REAL STORY?

Late April or early May, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is expected to launch a long-awaited study of airliner cabin air quality. At that time, DOT will issue a request for proposals from scientists interested in performing the study, which will measure a broad range of air contaminants and assess their impact on the health of passengers and crew.

Cabin air quality, like building air quality, is an emerging issue. Although almost no research has been done, cabin air quality is receiving increasing media attention as increasing numbers of passengers attribute colds, flu, headaches,

sinus irritation and other maladies to recirculated, dirty cabin air.

VENTILATION SYSTEMS

Airplanes have complex air conditioning and filtration systems that run off the engines and maintain cabin pressure. Older aircraft, such as the Boeing 727, use only fresh air to ventilate the cabin.

But newer fuel-efficient planes, such as the 737, mix fresh air with recirculated cabin air. Using recirculated air reduces fuel consumption, thus lowering costs for the airlines.

In November 1987, Paul Moriarty of Philadelphia's KYW-TV aired a three-part series on the subject. He interviewed a variety of experts on cabin air quality.

One, Ray Kary, described by Moriarty as an environmental expert, told the reporter that on flights lasting more than an hour or two, airliner cabins may be among the most polluted indoor environments the average person encounters.

KYW-TV hired Kary to take several flights and test cabin air quality with scientific equipment. Kary's findings: "The air was kind of bad. It was very uncomfortable for me. There were high

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FACTS ABOUT THE FEDERAL BAN

Begins April 23.

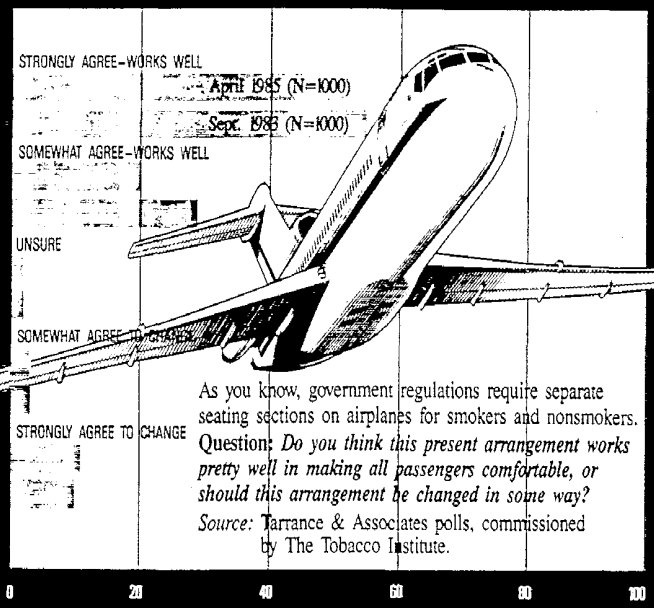
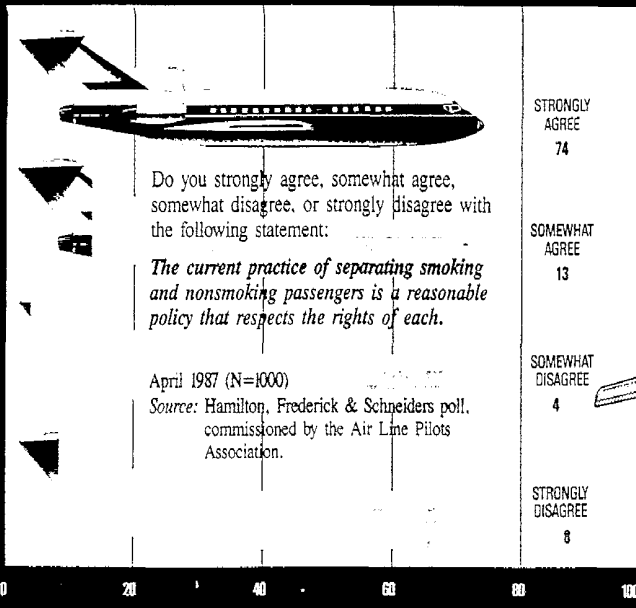
Smoking banned on flights scheduled for 2 hours or less.

Covers only domestic flights of U.S. airlines.

Scheduled to "sunset" in two years.

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Public Attitude Towards Separate Smoking/Nonsmoking Sections



PUBLIC OPINION SUGGESTS A BAN IS UNNECESSARY

During the 1987 debate over proposals to ban smoking on airlines, anti-smokers often cited a survey released by the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) to support their position.

However, the National Council on Public Polls (NCPP), an association of organizations involved in public opinion research, reviewed AARC's release and found that it violated standards adopted by the professional polling community because it failed to include methodological information.

"[S]ince the results of your survey were included in the public hearing record of the House Subcommittee on Aviation, I believe it was your ethical obligation to provide full information on methodology," NCPP president Harry O'Neill wrote to AARC. He added that if the methodology was "flawed in any way, the survey results should not play any role in the formulation of public policy."

PROFESSIONAL POLL RESULTS

At the same time, anti-smokers ignored data, developed over several years through professionally conducted surveys, that most Americans are satisfied with the then-current arrangement of providing separate sections for smokers and nonsmokers.

In 1987, the Air Line Pilots Association commissioned a survey of passenger attitudes on a wide variety of issues. That poll, conducted by Hamilton, Frederick & Schneiders, found that 87 percent of passengers feel that the "current practice of separating smoking and nonsmoking pas-

sengers is a reasonable policy that respects the rights of each."

In a 1983 survey commissioned by The Tobacco Institute, professional pollsters at Tarrance & Associates found that 83 percent of airline passengers were comfortable with the "separate sections" rules and did not see a need to change them. Eighty-two percent answered similarly when the same pollster posed the same question to airline passengers in 1985.

In another measure of passenger satisfaction with separate smoking and nonsmoking sections, over the last two years, only two percent of the complaints received by the Department of Transportation's consumer office were related to smoking. And consumer complaint data over the last decade show only a single smoking complaint for approximately every one million passengers flown.

THE AMERICAN PROTOCOL

When the National Academy of Sciences recommended a total airline smoking ban in August 1986, syndicated columnist William F. Buckley, Jr., a nonsmoker, countered: "One harbors a distaste for many things—some people don't like dogs, cats, obesity, bad grammar, film violence, film nonviolence. . . . But the American protocol is to let people do what they want to do—which is to cast bread upon the waters, given that the same protocol permits us to be our potty little selves."

David Brenton, president of the Mesa, Arizona-based Smoker's Rights Alliance, argues that the ban is "wholly unnecessary." However, he sees a larger problem.

"This just illustrates that airlines aren't interested in serving their customers," Brenton says. "In this instance, they obviously didn't fight to protect the rights

of 30 to 35 percent of their customers."

Smokers are encountering a new problem as well. They often book seats in the smoking section when they make reservations only to be told at the last minute that smoking will be banned because nonsmokers, who often fail to meet the check-in deadline, will be seated in the smoking section.

Airlines have no legal obligation to permit smoking. In fact, one airline, now-defunct Muse Air, tried to be the first nonsmoking airline. It went bankrupt. Northwest Airlines intends to repeat the Muse experiment.

ALTERNATIVES

What's a smoker to do? Brenton encourages people not to fly. "We are telling smokers and others who believe strongly in civil liberties to look for alternative means of transportation whenever possible," he says.

One such alternative may be provided by the Great American Smoker's Club. Established in Dallas earlier this year, the club plans to offer commuter airline service for smokers in markets throughout Texas and the Southwest.

"We want to offer cigarette smokers a choice to continue their right to smoke," the club's president, Glen Herndon, explains. "To fly on a plane nowadays, smokers are treated like second-class citizens and must sit in the back rows. When the smoking ban begins, we want to offer smokers an alternative."

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No Available Scientific Evidence Links ETS Exposure to Health Harm

Proponents of a smoking ban on airliners claim that environmental tobacco smoke represents a health hazard to nonsmokers. We asked an expert in environmental toxicology, Larry Holcomb, Ph.D., to comment. From 1981 to 1986, Dr. Holcomb was Executive Secretary of the Michigan Toxic Substance Control Commission where he supervised efforts to identify, monitor and control the release of toxic substances in the state. He now heads his own consulting firm.

■ **The Observer:** What is environmental tobacco smoke?

□ **Holcomb:** Environmental tobacco smoke, or ETS, is a combination of smoke exhaled by the smoker and smoke from the burning tip of a cigarette that is diluted, changed and absorbed by surrounding materials. The ETS that a nonsmoker is exposed to is very different from the original mixture, especially in concentration.

■ **The Observer:** Is an airline smoking ban justified on claimed adverse health effects of ETS?

□ **Holcomb:** There have been few studies of air quality on airlines. The limited data available show that nonsmokers exposed to ETS have exposure no greater than in many other public places. As there are no adverse health effects scientifically demonstrated in nonsmokers exposed to

ETS in these other settings, an airline smoking ban based on claimed health effects is not justified.

■ **The Observer:** How many cabin air quality studies have been conducted? What did they find?

□ **Holcomb:** I am aware of six studies, four of which took specific measurements for ETS. Three of the ETS studies have been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The six studies variously measured nicotine, particulates, carbon monoxide, ozone and humidity on several different types of aircraft. Particulates and carbon monoxide, though not unique to tobacco smoke, were found in concentrations well below levels known to cause adverse health effects.

Nicotine, while not a substance claimed to be related to adverse health effects in nonsmokers, was used as a marker in understanding patterns of exposure to ETS because it is unique to tobacco. It was found in low concentrations in the smoking section and in even lower concentrations in the nonsmoking section.

It is important to remember that ozone increases and humidity decreases at flight altitude. Both dry out and irritate eyes and nasal passages, which may exacerbate symptoms frequently attributed to ETS exposure.

■ **The Observer:** In his 1986 report on ETS, the Surgeon General claims that ETS causes disease, including lung cancer. Are his claims substantiated in the report?

□ **Holcomb:** No. The report reviews research findings on several respiratory ill-

nesses, lung function, asthma, cardiovascular diseases and cancers other than lung cancer for persons exposed to ETS. In each case, the report concluded that there was insufficient evidence that ETS has an adverse effect, or that there was no data to review.

■ **The Observer:** What kinds of research did the Surgeon General's report rely on with respect to ETS and incidence of lung cancer? Does this research support his claim?

□ **Holcomb:** The report relied upon 13 epidemiological studies. Five were conducted in the United States. The others were conducted abroad. All 13 studies looked at the incidence of lung cancer in nonsmoking women whose husbands smoked.

Most of the studies had systematic errors based on nonsmokers' responses to oral questions or written questionnaires. In some cases, smokers or former smokers misclassified themselves as nonsmokers. Some responses were biased by how the question was asked or by who answered the question. In other cases, lung cancer was not confirmed pathologically, or the length of exposure to ETS was not verified. In still other instances, not enough subjects were studied to draw valid conclusions.

Epidemiological studies cannot prove a cause of disease. Only two of the 13 studies reviewed by the Surgeon General were statistically significant. Both were conducted outside the United States, and both had several important methodological problems. Thus, in my view, the Surgeon General is not justified in claiming that ETS causes lung cancer.

Federal Restrictions Grow Stronger

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From Northwest's principal hub at Minneapolis, six carriers besides Northwest provide non-stop or one-stop service to New York, three to Los Angeles, three to Dallas, and two to Atlanta.

THE CHALLENGE

Smokers' rights activists expressed outrage at Northwest's action. Smoker's Rights Alliance president Dave Brenton called the policy "corporate bigotry."

Brenton challenged Northwest to a public debate on its policy: "Northwest Airlines not only has to answer the question of its shareholders and customers about how this gimmick will improve its image as a carrier wishing to meet pas-

senger concerns about airline safety, but also must explain how denying a service demanded by up to one-third of the adult population makes for a savvy business decision."

Although Brenton's challenge sparked tremendous media interest, particularly in Northwest hubs Detroit and Minneapolis, the carrier refused to debate him.

AIRLINE INDUSTRY REACTION

Northwest's decision surprised many airline industry analysts. The *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* called it a "marketing gamble." Published reports indicate that the nation's four largest airline companies—Texas Air Corporation (which owns Continental and Eastern), United, American and Delta—have no immediate plans to match the move.

Northwest is not the first airline to attempt to market a complete ban on smok-

ing. Years ago, Texas-based Muse Air was launched with great fanfare as the airline for nonsmokers. The experiment failed—Muse went bankrupt. Southwest Airlines, a competitor which eventually bought Muse, estimated that Muse had lost up to 30 percent of its potential customers with the smoking ban.

THE TWO-HOUR BAN

Northwest's total ban coincides with a new federal law banning smoking on flights of two hours or less. The law, scheduled to "sunset" in 1990, will apply to an estimated 80 percent of all U.S. flights.

The two-hour ban was passed by Congress last December 22 as part of the government's catch-all spending bill.



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Cabin Air Quality

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levels of carbon monoxide, high levels of carbon dioxide. Air quality was bad and very uncomfortable."

A flight attendant who appeared in the same series described the aircraft cabin as "just a cesspool of germs and bacteria."

"The air you breathe on many airlines may contain unhealthy levels of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, bacteria, ozone and even fumes from jet fuel," Moriarty concluded.

AIRLINES' POSITION

The airline industry denies cabin air quality is poor. The carriers claim that in-flight ventilation equals or exceeds standards for most indoor environments.

However, critics point to a 1979 incident involving a flight between Homer and Kodiak, AK, aboard a Boeing 737, as "proof" that cabin air represents a health risk. The plane was held at the gate in Homer for over four hours after an engine failed during takeoff. One passenger was suffering acute flu symptoms when the takeoff was aborted.

After landing in Kodiak, public health officials later determined that 72 percent of the passengers developed the flu. The case was easy to document because the majority of passengers visited the same clinic afterwards.

By its nature, air travel brings many people together for a short time and then disperses them after landing. Many illnesses take a day or two to develop, and those who become sick may not associate their maladies with flying. It is also rare for passengers on the same flight to visit the same doctor.

These considerations and the lack of in-flight data are what led DOT to propose a comprehensive study.

NAS REPORT

The study is an outgrowth of a well publicized August 1986 National Academy of Sciences' (NAS) report. Complying with a 1984 law, the Federal Aviation Administration commissioned the NAS to assemble a panel of experts to review available literature on a wide variety of issues pertaining to cabin air quality.

In releasing the report, the panel's chairman, Dr. Thomas C. Chalmers, concluded that "air quality on board commercial airliners warrants concern."

The panel admitted that "empirical evidence is lacking in quality and quantity." Moreover, "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 lack of data, the panel offered 21 recommendations to DOT. The most controversial called for a smoking ban on all domestic commercial flights.

DOT'S RESPONSE

DOT forwarded the NAS report to Congress in February 1987 with comments on each recommendation. The agency specifically rejected the smoking ban recommendation, citing the lack of scientific data and the need for further study.

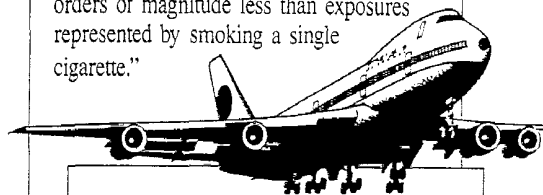
At the same time, DOT supported the NAS call for a "data collection program" measuring ventilation and a broad range of potential contaminants from all sources "during typical operations."

After assessing the feasibility of such a program, the Secretary of Transportation last fall sought and received congressional authority to reprogram existing funds to sponsor a study by independent contractors. The study is expected to be completed by early 1990, shortly before the two-hour smoking ban is scheduled to sunset.

TOBACCO SMOKE ABOARD AIRCRAFT

Among the few existing studies on aspects of cabin air quality, only four have taken specific measurements for environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). Each of these found minimal levels of ETS in the air.

The most recent, published in the American Chemical Society's peer-reviewed *Environmental Science & Technology* in October 1987, concluded, "segregation significantly reduces the exposure of persons seated in no-smoking sections to ETS." The results also "indicate that average exposures to ETS are orders of magnitude less than exposures represented by smoking a single cigarette."



As a smoker, or even as a nonsmoker who believes that the government-imposed airline smoking ban has gone too far or is unnecessary, take this opportunity to get involved.

The Tobacco Institute can provide information on the airline smoking regulations, claimed effects of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), and ventilation issues. Detailed information on these subjects as well as many others is available from The Institute upon request, free of charge. Please contact us at:

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Published monthly and available free from:
The Tobacco Institute
1875 I Street Northwest, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20006

The *Observer* presents information and comment on public events of interest to the tobacco industry. It recognizes that there is diversity of opinion about tobacco use and that charges against tobacco are widely publicized while less attention is given to differing views, which are included in its columns. Its aim is to aid full, free and informed discussion in the public interest, in the conviction that the smoking and health controversy must be resolved by scientific research.

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