AIRCRAFT CABIN AIR QUALITY

The Immediate Threat

In 1986, a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel recommended that smoking on airlines be banned. Legislation has been introduced in Congress that would ban smoking on all domestic commercial flights.

What's At Stake?

o   A smoking ban will create administrative and practical problems, and may pose a safety threat.

o   In-flight tests of cabin air quality conducted to date indicate that cigarette smoke is not a demonstrated problem.

o   Airline smoking bans already have been thoroughly considered and rejected by federal aviation agencies, and by airline passenger surveys.

What Are the Facts?

Smoking bans would pose administrative, practical and safety problems

A smoking ban is likely to create serious compliance problems, diverting the time and attention of flight crews, and imposing additional burdens on already busy airline employees. Foreign carriers which permit smoking would have a competitive edge on international routes, particularly on long-haul flights to destinations where smoking is especially popular.

Prohibiting smoking creates an on-board fire hazard, by encouraging surreptitious smoking, especially in lavatories.

In-air tests: Tobacco smoke is not a problem

No detailed governmental or private in-flight test research supports proposals to ban smoking on aircraft. All major in-flight tests of tobacco smoke conducted since 1971 have concluded that the amount of cigarette smoke detected in actual commercial flights is extremely small, posing no demonstrated risk to nonsmoking passengers or flight personnel. The Department of Transportation in a 1987 response to the National Academy of Sciences recommendation for a smoking ban, called for further research, including consideration of technological solutions and ventilation system modifications.

Smoking on airlines already is sharply restricted

Tobacco smoking on U.S. commercial aircraft already is subject to extensive regulation. Federal aviation agencies have considered

rules for smoking aboard aircraft for more than a decade, in nearly a dozen rulemakings.

In 1983-84, the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) conducted an extensive review of the issue. After considering hundreds of written submissions and conducting three days of hearings and oral argument, the board rejected a proposal to ban smoking on flights of two hours or less. However, it did curb smoking on small commercial aircraft, and guaranteed a no-smoking seat to every passenger who requests one by the designated check-in time -- even if a smoking section must be reduced or eliminated to satisfy such requests.

Airline passengers are satisfied with the current rules

Eighty-seven percent of respondents to a 1987 poll sponsored by the Air Line Pilots Association agreed that the current system of separating smoking and nonsmoking passengers is a reasonable policy that respects the wishes of each.

The Department of Transportation's own monthly consumer complaint report data for U.S. carriers consistently shows no more than a single smoking complaint for each one million passengers. Smoking complaints are declining both in absolute terms and relative to all other airline consumer concerns.

What Should Congress Do?

Legislation to prohibit smoking on board commercial aircraft is unwarranted and inappropriate. The current smoking restrictions, which already favor nonsmoking passengers, are supported by an overwhelming majority of the flying public. All in-flight tests of tobacco smoke conducted in the last 15 years have concluded that the amount of smoke in the airline cabin is extremely small, posing no demonstrated risk to aircraft cabin occupants. Also, smoking bans would pose significant administrative and practical problems for airlines, as well as a safety threat to the flying public.