

August 13, 1986

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MEMORANDUM

To: William Kloepfer, Jr.
From: Susan M. Stuntz
Re: National Academy of Sciences Cabin Air Quality
Recommendations

As expected, the National Academy of Sciences committee on aircraft cabin air quality today called for a ban on smoking on all domestic commercial aircraft. What was unexpected was the degree of skepticism with which the press greeted this announcement.

Committee chairman Thomas Chalmers and vice-chairs Paul Halfpenny and John Spengler faced -- and fumbled -- questions from about 60 reporters, many of whom had attended the TI news conference August 12. About 20 cameras were at the NAS lecture hall for the report's official release.

The committee faced a similarly hostile audience during an afternoon session convened to give the public -- including the airline industry, flight attendants and anti-smokers -- an opportunity to question conclusions.

Describing environmental tobacco smoke as a "hazardous substance" and the most frequent source of complaints, the committee recommended a ban on smoking on all domestic commercial aircraft to: reduce irritation and discomfort to passengers and crew; reduce potential health hazards to crew; eliminate the possibility of in-flight fires; and bring cabin air quality into line with standards for other closed environments.

Aside from what it described as "measurements of opportunity," the committee conducted no in-flight measurement of constituents of cabin air. It also admitted that in aircraft without recirculation, passengers in the nonsmoking section and crew members whose duties do not take them into the smoking section "are relatively unexposed."

For the crew who are in the smoking section, however, the committee reported ETS exposures equivalent to that of living with a pack a day smoker. And although it noted criticisms of the studies to date on possible

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health effects of ETS, the committee concluded "that there is a positive association between lung cancer and chronic exposure to ETS."

Reporters were openly skeptical about the absence of data, particularly in light of the committee's admission that most were former smokers who were annoyed by ETS. "How do you expect your recommendations to get off the ground without the data to support it," one asked. And another chimed in, "Are you saying, 'trust us'?"

Institute and airline statements in advance of the NAS event had noted public satisfaction with the current regulations. One reporter asked how, if smoke represented as great a problem as the committee was suggesting, the majority of the flying public likes the current arrangement. Another challenged Chalmers to submit his own polling data, noting that "the evidence seems to point in the other direction."

One reporter asked the committee's reaction to the RJR in-flight testing results. Spengler admitted that the committee had received a copy of the study after all deliberations had been completed; he noted that it had not yet been submitted to peer review and would "await judgment." The nicotine measures, he said, could not be extrapolated to measure exposures to other substances in ETS; he also noted that the report did not address ventilation rates on the aircraft studied, or number of cigarettes smoked. Chalmers added that the idea of measuring nicotine to determine ETS exposure was "new to us...particulate measures are more appropriate."

The committee came under heavy questioning for the absence of substantive recommendations in other areas of study. The panel noted a lack of data and recommended further study on questions of particulates, humidification, airborne bacteria, ventilation, etc. Halfpenny, a former Lockheed engineer, admitted that airlines frequently reduce ventilation to save money and admitted that, with a smoking ban, additional reductions would be possible.

One reporter, noting that low humidity and lack of ventilation cause the same symptoms as those the committee was linking to ETS, asked repeatedly about improving the former rather than banning the latter. Increased humidity is too expensive, and improved ventilation unnecessary with a smoking ban, said Chalmers, who held out a possibility of an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease if humidification were increased.

In the afternoon session, flight attendants' unions pressed for answers on ventilation issues and attacked

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the airlines for their reported reluctance to allow on-board testing. When Chalmers suggested that independent testing might be appropriate than airline testing, the Air Transport Assn.'s Don Collier replied testily, "we're responsible for everything else under regulation."

And when the committee suggested that smokers taking long flights book connecting flights with sufficient time to smoke in the airport, Collier asked, "have you given any thought to what this would mean to our scheduling?"

James Repace, present at both sessions but silent throughout, claimed a new area of expertise when a question was raised about the possible effects of tobacco smoke on the instrumentation in the cockpit. Saying he was an engineer, Repace admitted to a great deal of concern about possible effects.

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