



A bold voice for transportation workers

COMMON SENSE REGULATIONS ON AIRCRAFT CABIN TEMPERATURES

Many people who fly regularly are familiar with the temperature irregularities on board aircraft. You might be sweating and overheated before takeoff only to find yourself shivering and reaching for a blanket mid-flight. It is uncomfortable, for sure, but most just shrug it off as an inconvenience that comes with flying. Far too often, however, temperatures on board aircraft can rise or dip to dangerous levels, presenting a serious health and safety risk for passengers and flight crewmembers alike. Shockingly, there are no federal regulations governing internal cabin temperature. This oversight has gone on for too long, and we call on the Department of Transportation (DOT) to issue reasonable and meaningful regulations on in-cabin temperatures.

There have been several well-publicized incidents when the health of passengers or crewmembers has been threatened by extreme temperatures. In June of 2017, an infant overheated and required hospitalization while on the tarmac at Denver International Airport. Earlier, during the summer of 2013, several passengers fell ill after being subjected to overwhelmingly hot temperatures for over two hours on board an aircraft in Las Vegas, NV. These reported incidents, however, do not show the full scope of the health and safety problem presented by extreme temperatures.

On July 2, 2018, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA-CWA), a TTD affiliate, filed a petition asking the DOT to conduct a rulemaking to prevent incidents of extreme onboard temperature conditions on commercial flights. In support of this petition, AFA-CWA included incident reports from the NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS), a confidential, voluntary program that allows crewmembers to report incidents without fear of retaliation by their employer or the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). These documented reports submitted by both pilots and flight attendants show how pervasive this problem is, as well as the threats they cause to safe flight operation. Extreme temperatures have caused crewmembers to fall ill, required planes to divert to different airports, and have caused severe delays when extreme temperatures require passengers to be deplaned. There have also been incidents when passengers become aggravated and even hostile due to extreme heat or cold, creating a dangerous environment for passengers and crew alike. Many, though not all of these incidents occur during lengthy delays on the tarmac.

DOT currently has the legal authority to regulate aircraft cabin temperatures. In response to public pressure over lengthy tarmac delays, Congress included language in the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 that required air carriers and airports to submit emergency contingency plans for tarmac delays to DOT for review and approval. The plans must address, among other things, how carriers will “provide adequate food, potable water, restroom facilities, comfortable cabin temperatures, and access to medical treatment for passengers onboard aircraft” when a flight is delayed on the tarmac. In a 2014 report on the impact of tarmac delays, however, the DOT Inspector General (DOTIG) found that DOT had not defined

nor required comfortable cabin temperatures. At the conclusion of the report, the DOTIG recommended that DOT “define comfortable cabin temperature and include the requirement in DOT regulations.”

On August 1, 2018 the 2Hot2Cold App was launched in order to help spur government action and to document the true scope of the problem. This free mobile app allows crewmembers and passengers to document and report incidents of extreme temperatures on aircraft. Flight attendant unions have also provided their employees with portable thermometers to provide accurate documentation. Submissions will be catalogued and submitted to DOT in support of the petition for rulemaking.

Just one incident where an infant is hospitalized or a passenger or crewmember becomes seriously ill should spur government action to ensure that these events never happen again. DOT has the ability and the obligation to issue common sense regulations on cabin temperatures in order to further advance aviation safety.

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