



## ASSEMBLY – 35TH SESSION

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

#### Agenda Item 19: Health and well-being of passengers and crews

#### SAFETY AND HEALTH OF CABIN CREWS AND PASSENGERS

[Presented by the International Transport Workers' Federation, (ITF)]

#### SUMMARY

This Working Paper discusses the history of safety and health regulation in the cabin of civil aircraft. It is the opinion of the ITF that consistent, global regulation of safety and health hazards faced by cabin crews and passengers has been lacking. To resolve this situation, the ITF recommends that Contracting States consider the cabin as a workplace, and as such grant ultimate authority for its regulation to appropriate occupational safety and health authorities, rather than traditional aviation safety authorities.

#### REFERENCES

A35-WP/34  
Annex 9 — *Facilitation*  
FAL/12-WP/69  
U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Act, Public Law 91-596,  
29 December 1970.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Executive Committee for the 35th Session of the ICAO General Assembly has invited the Assembly to consider and adopt a draft Resolution on the protection of health of passengers and crews on international flights.

The ITF strongly supports all elements of the proposed draft Resolution. The ITF believes that the global air transport industry, operating under requirements of the aviation authorities of

<sup>1</sup> English, French and Spanish versions provided by ITF.

most ICAO Member states, has failed to ensure that adequate safety and health standards are provided to all cabin occupants, passengers and crew, traveling on commercial transport aircraft. Generally, this results from an understanding that the aircraft cabin is much more than an enclosure for revenue-producing seats. It is in fact a workplace, and must be treated as such and regulated by authorities employing personnel trained to high levels of competence in workplace safety and health enforcement.

The ITF believes that ICAO must address this situation at a global level to retain the confidence of workers and the traveling public in civil air transport. To illustrate the general lack of meaningful standards to protect the safety and health of passengers and crew, this paper will focus on four issues of concern to the ITF.

## **CHEMICAL DISINSECTION**

Disinsectants currently approved for use in aircraft cabins – the primary active ingredients are the pyrethroids permethrin and phenothrin – have been associated with adverse chronic and acute human health effects. Accordingly, the ITF, its affiliates and the traveling public have longstanding concerns regarding the inconsistent and inappropriate application of such chemicals on board aircraft.

Earlier this year at the 12th Session of the ICAO Facilitation Division (FAL/12) in Cairo, Egypt, the ITF introduced a Working Paper (FAL/12-WP/69) to highlight the issues and forward several recommendations for consideration by the assembled Delegates. The ITF urged a more rigorous and restrictive approach to disinsection practices, as well as urgent action to identify alternative, non-chemical means of controlling those insects that pose a demonstrated risk to Member States. The Division agreed with this and adopted Recommendation A/14 to revise Standard 2.24 of Annex 9: “When disinsection is required a Contracting State shall authorize or accept only those methods, whether chemical or non-chemical, and/or insecticides, which are recommended by the World Health Organization.”

Furthermore, the Division adopted three additional B-type recommendations.

- Recommendation B/14 strongly encourages States to implement the Annex 9 Standards on aircraft disinsection, in particular to limit the requirement for disinsection to aircraft operations which pose a threat and to review requirements and modify them on the basis of demonstrable need.
- Recommendation B/15 invites ICAO to assume a leadership role with States, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other stakeholders such as the ITF to clarify the intent of current disinsection Standards and develop guidance material to minimize exposure to pesticides in the cabin and cockpit.
- Recommendation B/16 encourages ICAO to urgently coordinate with Contracting States and the WHO to evaluate and document assessments of the efficacy, practicability and cost-effectiveness of alternatives to chemical methods of disinsection, and, where appropriate, to record the approval of such alternatives.

## **CABIN AIR QUALITY**

Poor air quality in the passenger cabin has been associated with symptoms ranging from headaches and blurred vision to permanent disability. Bad air quality can often be traced to incidents of inadequate ventilation and/or chemical contamination of the air with engine oils, pesticides, and cleaning agents, among others. Despite many crew and passenger reports of poor air quality, and despite the fact that cabin crews are unable to leave their workplace mid-shift for a breath of air, they typically lack the protection of an appropriate ventilation standard. Furthermore, cabin crews typically need not be informed of any chemical exposure hazards, and lack access to company medical and exposure records, as they would under an OSH authority.

## **CARRY-ON BAGGAGE RULES**

Excess or overweight cabin baggage represents both a health hazard to employees and passengers and an aviation safety risk. Gate agents and ground staff face injury when manually transporting excess or overweight items from the gate to the hold, often via steep steps in the jetway or in poor weather, or under severe time constraints. Cabin crews suffer disc, neck, and shoulder injuries from lifting bags into overhead bins. Items can fall from overhead bins, causing injury to crew or passengers, as a result of carelessness, turbulence, failure of latches or poor bin design. Cabin baggage containing flammable spirits can represent an additional safety risk. In spite of ICAO rules stating that all baggage must be safely stowed, excess baggage may obstruct access to emergency exits, cause delays, congestion, obstruction of slides and exits. For such reasons, cabin baggage or planeside checked baggage should be limited to one item, or a combination of items, and a weight limit introduced as well. ICAO regulation should be universally enforced.

## **OSH PROTECTIONS FOR CABIN CREWS**

Job-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths lead to incalculable human costs, and industry suffers from the resulting lost production and wages, medical expenses, and disability compensation. In response, in 1970 the U.S. Congress enacted the Occupational Safety and Health Act. In 1975 the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration claimed exclusive jurisdiction over the health and safety of cabin crew and flight deck crew while onboard aircraft. Over the years, this unfortunate precedent has been copied by most national authorities. Furthermore, because most aviation authorities focus primarily on ensuring the safety, i.e. the prevention of catastrophic results, and economic viability of air travel, and tend to lack expertise in regulating occupational safety and health hazards, mandatory standards to protect cabin crews and passengers have been rejected in favor of unenforceable, voluntary "guidelines".

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Several of the hazards faced by cabin crews and passengers are discussed above. To minimize the adverse effects of these and other safety and health hazards, the ITF encourages Contracting States to take the immediate step of granting regulatory authority over safety and health in the cabins of civil aircraft to occupational safety and health authorities, rather than aviation safety authorities. In the long term, the ITF recommends that universal and globally consistent occupational safety and health standards be developed for cabin crews on civil aircraft, and that these standards be adopted and enforced by all Member States.

We all have a stake in ensuring the safety and health of all occupants in civil transport aircraft cabins. Aviation trade unions, through the ITF, stand ready to work with industry, government and public interest groups to create comprehensive, consistent solutions to these safety and health challenges, and further the mission of the Executive Committee to protect the health of passengers and crews.

**THE ASSEMBLY IS INVITED TO:**

- a) note this Working Paper;
- b) consider means by which the safety and health of cabin occupants on civil transport aircraft might be enhanced; and
- c) express a commitment to dialogue and ITF participation in any safety and health initiatives arising from this 35th Session.

— END —