



International Civil Aviation Organization

WORKING PAPER

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ASSEMBLY — 36TH SESSION

TECHNICAL COMMISSION

Agenda Item 30: Other safety matters

**OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH PROTECTIONS
FOR CABIN CREW MEMBERS**

(Presented by the International Transport Workers' Federation)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper discusses the history and current situation with respect to occupational safety and health regulations as applied within the cabin of commercial transport aircraft. Typically, such workplace regulations, where they exist at all, are enforced by the national aviation authority. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is concerned that aviation authorities lack adequate resources and expertise to ensure the safety and health of cabin crew members.

The ITF therefore recommends that ICAO work with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and personnel organizations (trade unions), industry, government and public interest group representatives to study existing policies, guidance and regulations to recommend to Contracting States Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) that will help to ensure the safety and health of cabin crew working on board aircraft in civil air transport operations.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) note this working paper and recommend to the Council that it study the effectiveness of existing and proposed Standards and regulatory mechanisms for ensuring safety and health in the aircraft cabin;
- b) invite the ITF and other interested parties such as the ILO to participate in this process;
- c) apply this information to the development of new SARPs;
- d) and encourage Contracting States to adopt these SARPs.

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| <i>Strategic Objectives:</i> | This working paper relates to Strategic Objective A – <i>Safety</i> by identifying an existing safety risk to civil aviation crew members, and recommending an effective global response to address the risk. |
| <i>Financial implications:</i> | To be determined. |
| <i>References:</i> | A35-WP/34 A35-WP/176 A35-WP/343 |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has commented in A35-WP/176, written in response to an Assembly invitation to consider and adopt a draft Resolution on the protection of health of passengers and crew members on international flights, that the global commercial air transport industry, historically regulated by the aviation authorities of most ICAO member States, has failed to ensure adequate safety and health for all cabin occupants including passengers and crew. The Executive Committee for the 35th Session of the ICAO General Assembly, in noting A35-WP/176, commented that it "saw merit in ITF participation in future safety and health initiatives". Assembly Resolution A35-12 recognized the importance of protecting crew health, and requested the Council to review existing Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) related to airplane occupant health and develop new SARPs where appropriate, and "establish suitable institutional arrangements to coordinate efforts by Contracting States and other members of the international civil aviation community aimed at protecting the health of passengers and crews". In support of Resolution A35-12, the ITF expands on its comments submitted in A35-WP/176, and recommends that new SARPs be developed and adopted by Contracting States in order to ensure the safety and health of cabin crew working on board civil air transport aircraft.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Cabin crew members encounter numerous occupational hazards while working on board civil air transport aircraft. These hazards include turbulence, severe air pressure changes, unwieldy service carts, poorly maintained and designed galley equipment and doors, heavy luggage and exit doors exposure to toxic chemicals, unruly passengers, communicable diseases, threats of terrorism, and emergency evacuations. In the United States, for example, an ITF analysis of survey data available from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, www.bls.gov) has shown that such hazards cause cabin crew members to suffer occupational injuries and illnesses at rates four times that of all workers in private industry.

2.2 Historically, these alarmingly high rates of occupational injury and illness among United States cabin crew can be traced to a policy notice published on July 10, 1975 by the United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). With this notice, the FAA asserted complete and exclusive jurisdiction over crew member safety and health on "civil aircraft in operation ...from the time it is first boarded by a crew member, preparatory to a flight, to the time the last crewmember leaves the aircraft after completion of that flight, . . . even if the engines are shut down".

2.3 Importantly, the 1975 FAA policy notice effectively preempted the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) from prescribing regulations that would have helped to ensure cabin crew safety and health. There are many examples of OSHA regulations that have no corresponding FAA counterpart, including (but not limited to) the recording and reporting of occupational injuries and illnesses; protections against exposures to various hazards such as blood borne pathogens and workplace noise; hygiene and sanitation standards; provisions requiring employer communications of toxic workplace hazards; guarantees of access to employee exposure and medical records, and anti-discrimination protections for reporting safety and health violations.

2.4 In the United States and other countries that have adopted the United States model, mandatory Standards that could provide effective protections to cabin crew and passengers have been

rejected in favor of unenforceable voluntary “guidelines” that are generally ignored by airline operators due to competitive market pressures. In some countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada, the aviation authorities have recently begun to enforce workplace regulations developed by or in close coordination with the occupational safety and health authorities. It is unclear at this time how well these “hybrid” regulatory models protect cabin crew safety and health. However, given that the primary focus of global aviation authorities is to ensure the general safety (i.e. prevent catastrophic results) and economic viability of air travel, it would not be surprising to learn that even these agencies would tend to devote few resources and expertise to regulating and enforcing occupational safety and health hazards.

3. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 It is vitally important to the civil aviation sector that the safety and health of occupants traveling and working in civil transport aircraft cabins be protected. This can best be achieved by eliminating or minimizing workplace hazards. To accomplish this on an international scale, the ITF recommends that universal and globally consistent occupational safety and health Standards for cabin occupants on civil aircraft be developed, and that these Standards be adopted and enforced by all Member States. To achieve these goals, the ITF encourages ICAO, with the assistance of the ILO and labor, industry, government and public interest entities, to study the effectiveness of existing and proposed Standards and regulatory mechanisms for ensuring safety and health in the aircraft cabin, and report these findings to Contracting States.

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