



DISRUPTIVE PASSENGERS

ERA's summary and advice to members on safety and security caused by disruptive passenger behaviour



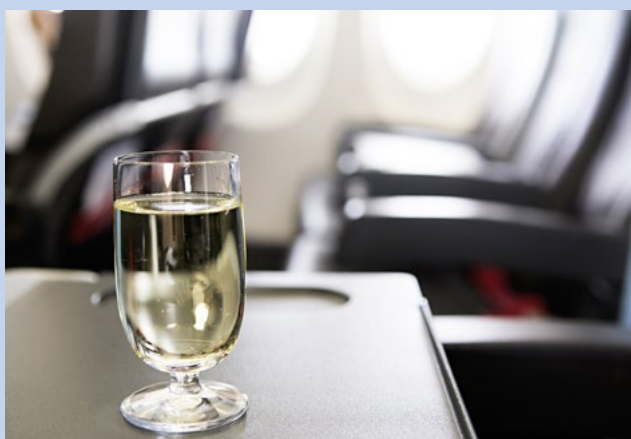
Instances of disruptive passenger behaviour in the EU during 2018 increased 34 per cent on the previous year, and figures for 2019 show that in the EU a flight is disrupted, delayed or diverted due to unruly passenger behaviour every three hours. Such behaviour can result in both a safety and security risk to the aircraft, the crew and fellow passengers. Whatever the act of disruption by a passenger,

whether threatening the safety of an aircraft by distracting cabin crew from their normal duties, tampering with on-board equipment or simply disobeying instructions, there must be a zero-tolerance policy. It is worth noting that airlines have a right to refuse to carry an individual that they consider a potential risk to the safety of the aircraft, its crew or its passengers.

WHAT IS DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR?

There are a number of situations classified as disruptive passenger behaviour, as illustrated by the following examples:

- **Excessive alcohol consumption** – by far the most common problem, usually starting at the airport establishments that sell alcohol and continuing on board the aircraft, especially when complementary alcoholic beverages are on offer or when passengers consume their duty free alcohol.
- **Tampering with toilet smoke detectors** – smoking on board is prohibited by almost all commercial airlines. Passengers have tried to bypass this restriction by deactivating the smoke detector in order to smoke in the aircraft toilet.
- **Threats and/or verbal/physical abuse** – often aimed at cabin crew and ground staff for various reasons such as late boarding or departure, refusal of an upgrade or change of seat and most commonly refusal of alcoholic beverages. Statistically, 72 per cent of all reported incidents in the EU involve some form of physical aggression.
- **Taking hand luggage during an evacuation** – we are seeing more examples of passengers evacuating aircraft with hand luggage in emergency situations, which is in direct contravention of pre-flight safety announcements.



- **Portable Electronic Devices (PEDs)** – refusal to turn off or switch to flight mode when ordered by the cabin crew.
- **Tampering with aircraft doors** – an action attributed to both nervous and angry passengers with obvious safety consequences.
- **Non-compliance with cabin crew instructions** – cabin crew ensure the safety and security of the aircraft cabin is preserved at all times. Non-compliance by a passenger of any on-board instruction(s) is a breach of cabin crew (and airline) authority.
- **Disputes with fellow passengers** – this can escalate quite quickly and is triggered by various scenarios including seats being reclined, tray tables slammed shut, noisy infants and other anti-social behaviour.
- **General anti-social behaviour** – common with passengers travelling together in large groups to 'party' destinations combined with consuming excessive amounts of alcohol.
- **Stress and nervousness** – for some, flying can be a stressful experience and as such may cause individuals to behave differently.

Combined with the above scenarios, when reporting an incident, a number of airline operators use the IATA categories of unruly behaviour, split into four levels of severity:

- **Level 1:** includes verbal aggression or failure to comply with crew instructions;
- **Level 2:** includes physical aggression or lewdness against fellow passengers or crew and damage to the cabin;
- **Level 3:** includes threats to life, and presenting of weapons on board; and
- **Level 4:** includes a breach of the flight deck (intended or unintended), an act of sabotage or a credible threat of seizing the aircraft.

AIRPORT PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

When combating instances of unruly behaviour, it is vital to recognise the early warning signs of a passenger who could ultimately become disruptive. Although it is widely understood that cabin crew have training in de-escalation skills to combat disruptive behaviour, airport ground staff also have a critical role to play in preventing such incidents. By utilising their observational skills, ground staff are able to monitor and ultimately identify passengers who have the potential to be disruptive before they board the aircraft.

With the airport gate being the last barrier prior to boarding, it is critical that ground staff use their authorised powers to prevent boarding where necessary. The golden rule is that safety should begin on the ground, and as well as at the gate, there are numerous opportunities throughout the airport for identifying the warning signs of disruptive behaviour. This includes check-in desks, security queues, airline/airport lounges, duty free shops and airside food and beverage establishments.

DURING THE FLIGHT

Disruptive passenger behaviour can pose distinct threats to the safety and security of aircraft, flight crew and fellow passengers. It can also generate costly disruptions to airlines and passengers alike in situations when aircraft are required to divert in order to manage these incidents. Additionally, such an incident has the potential to damage an airline's image.

Many regional airlines operate with a single member of cabin crew. As a result, the issue of disruption by one or more passengers is amplified due to the two persons in the cockpit ruling, preventing one of the pilots assisting the cabin crew member, whose de-escalation skills are already compromised. The result is that the aircraft cabin and its (law-abiding) passengers are placed in a situation of considerable risk.

Non-compliance with the pre-flight safety announcement can also result in any number of safety issues. For example, refusal to turn off PEDs that are overheating can lead to a potentially catastrophic lithium battery fire. Not returning to a seat when the overhead seatbelt light is illuminated can result in injury to the passenger(s) concerned, especially in the event of sudden turbulence. A re-occurring problem witnessed during many aircraft emergency evacuations is passengers bringing their cabin baggage with them during their escape. Retrieval of cabin baggage has proved to slow down the escape flow of passengers, which can become a major factor in the number of fatalities in what should be a survivable incident.

PRIMARY CAUSE: EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

The steady increase in anti-social behaviour associated with excessive alcohol consumption on board aircraft is of great concern to the industry. Statistically, excessive alcohol consumption by passengers disrupts on average 50 flights per day globally. Cabin crew are able to monitor consumption of and ultimately refuse the sale of alcohol whilst on board an aircraft, however, they have no way of knowing how much the passengers have consumed prior to boarding. This is where the observations and subsequent actions of the staff employed at airport establishments selling alcohol have a critical role to play. The key is that prevention is better than cure. A passenger being prevented from boarding due to their intoxicated condition is easier to manage than the consequences that can easily escalate once the individual is on board the aircraft and demands more alcohol.

A total ban on the sale of alcohol on board an aircraft is an extreme option. Whereas simply educating passengers about the effects and consequences of irresponsible drinking may go some way to combating the problem.

UNRULY PASSENGER RESTRAINT

To combat effectively any potentially disruptive behaviour, it is vital for cabin crew to recognise the early signs and employ the proper de-escalation skills. Such skills could involve verbal warnings, refusing alcohol or utilising a warning card system. Additionally, cabin crew have four basic guidelines they must observe when dealing with unruly passenger situations:

1. be vocal;
2. be assertive;
3. do NOT back down;
4. accept that (in extreme cases) they may be physically assaulted.

If the situation escalates to a level whereby the passenger becomes violent, cabin crew should consider either physically restraining the passenger, or employing self-defence techniques. However, physical restraint should only be used where the cabin crew have the required level of training and competency. Any inadvertent injury to the disruptive passenger or other passengers could either result in an escalation of the problem, or legal ramifications for the airline. As a result, some airlines teach their cabin crew not to employ restraint techniques and instead the flight crew have instructions to divert to the nearest operationally safe airport. Statistics provided by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) show that one flight per month in the EU required an emergency landing due to unruly passenger behaviour.

Ideally, assistance from fellow passengers, especially in the event of a single cabin crew flight, should be avoided. The danger here is that the passenger assisting may lack the skills or training in restraint, which could ultimately result in either escalation of the situation or serious injury to the disruptive passenger.

Education, prevention and enforcement are the three pillars that can best reduce disruptive passenger behaviour. Passengers must be educated on the safety and security consequences disruptive behaviour can have on board an aircraft. To prevent such events unfolding, airport and airline employees must have the necessary degree of empowerment in order to effectively carry out their duty and if required restrict alcohol, provide warnings and where necessary, refuse boarding. Enforcement measures will only be effective if adopted in a robust, harmonised manner across all EU member states. Instances where local police have met an aircraft following a disruptive passenger event and then not taken action against the perpetrators are quite common – this lack of enforcement impairs deterrence.

ERA and its members supported EASA on the 'Not on my Flight' disruptive passenger awareness campaign, including a video, launched in April 2019. The video supporting the campaign and shown across social media platforms was viewed by thousands of users. In the video,

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three common cases of disruptive behaviour were highlighted, namely excess alcohol consumption, smoking and verbal abuse. The key message of the campaign is zero tolerance against unruly passengers, a statement ERA supports.

In June 2019, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and International Airport Transport Association (IATA) launched new guidance supporting the prevention and management of unruly and disruptive passengers. The new ICAO 'Manual on the Legal Aspects of Unruly and Disruptive Passengers' (Doc 10117) is a key result emerging from the adoption of the Protocol to Amend the Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft (Montreal Protocol of 2014). Its chief aim is to assist national governments in legislating appropriate, improved and harmonised legal measures to prevent and deal with unruly and disruptive passenger incidents on international flights.



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