

Disruptive Passengers

What this paper is about

This paper provides an update on the problem of disruptive and drunken passengers at airports and on board aircraft and gives an overview of initiatives being undertaken by the industry.

Points for Discussion

- To discuss initiatives at member ACC airports aimed at creating the right environment for passengers that discourages unruly behaviour and drunkenness.
- To identify areas of success and best practice.

Possible Action

Dependent on the discussion at the meeting.

Background

1. At last year's Annual Meeting, Glasgow Prestwick ACC raised the issue of the increasing number of disruptive passengers and drunkenness at their airport and enquired how other airports/ACCs addressed the matter. At that time it appeared that there was not a significant issue with unruly passengers at other airports.

2. However, over the past year there has been an increase in the number of incidents involving disruptive and drunken passengers either being refused boarding or resulting in flights being diverted or delayed. It is understood that the figures published by the CAA do not truly reflect the extent of the problem as many airlines do not report all incidents. The Secretariat has undertaken further research on the current situation and how the industry is reacting to the problem.

3. The legal framework appeared in the Tokyo Convention of 1963, which made it unlawful to commit "acts which may or do jeopardise the safety of the aircraft or of persons or property therein or which jeopardize good order and discipline on board". This has been implemented in national laws, and in the UK is addressed in the Air Navigation Order 2009.

4. Some critics have called for a ban on the sale of alcohol on board flights, but in many cases the offending passengers have drunk too much prior to boarding in airport bars and restaurants. It should also be noted that drunkenness is not the only cause of unruly passengers and there are many other behaviours and incidents that result in aggressive and disruptive behaviour. There is therefore a need for a combined approach to the problem by all players in the industry.

Robert Goodwill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport

5. In a speech made by Robert Goodwill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport on 23 November 2015, he stated that several airlines had written to Government expressing their growing concern about the problem. Over the summer of 2015, he advised that one airline experienced over 360 incidents. He mentioned that airlines needed to look at their approach to serving alcohol on board and gave an example of Jet2's new campaign "Onboard Together", which seeks to educate passengers and empower their crew.

6. He also advised that the AOA and BATA have already shown leadership in their desire to bring the industry together to find new solutions and he acknowledged that no one party — airlines, airports or government — can solve the problem alone but can through each own sphere of responsibility act to reduce the risks. BATA and the AOA are drawing up common behaviour regulations and airlines have written to the Transport Secretary asking for the Government's support.

7. The Minister also stated that the Police can be a great help where a risk of drunkenness has been identified, and can work with airports to locate officers near boarding gates for flights that have proven problematic in the past, or for flights that have been delayed.

The CAA

8. The CAA reported 139 incidents of disruptive passengers on UK-registered aircraft in 2013. But that number will hide the real total, as many incidents dealt with by airlines do not end up being reported.

9. The CAA's new website now includes in its consumer/passenger section guidance to passengers about what happens to disruptive/drunken passengers. It states that airlines have a right to refuse to carry passengers that they consider to be a potential risk to the safety of the aircraft, its crew or its passengers and highlights a number of typical examples and what is deemed as unacceptable behaviour while on board including:

- Endangering the safety of an aircraft

- Being drunk in an aircraft
- Smoking
- Disobeying a lawful command from the commander of an aircraft, and
- Acting in a disruptive manner (including interfering with the work of a member of the cabin crew).

10. It also states that serious offences could result in a large fine and/or imprisonment.

BATA

11. In March this year, BATA issued a statement on disruptive passenger incidents in which it stated that while disruptive behaviour remains rare, incidents can have a big impact – on fellow passengers, on employees, and on the disruptive passengers themselves. Airline data suggests that excessive and uncontrolled alcohol consumption is a common cause of incidents, but it is not the only factor. Whatever the reason, BATA states that everyone should understand that it is an offence to be abusive, threatening, insulting or disorderly towards aircraft crew and that it is also illegal to board an aircraft whilst drunk or to be drunk whilst on an aircraft. BATA member airlines have a zero-tolerance approach to this issue. BATA is working with its members and partner organisations across the industry to deliver further practical measures to provide a consistent and robust response to this problem.

IATA

12. As reported at last year's Annual Meeting, IATA issued in January 2015 guidance to airlines on "Unruly Passenger Prevention and Management". The guidance was not intended to replace or to contradict any current State regulations but contains additional guidance including developing policy, the categorisation of incidents, sample passenger warnings and a sample passenger awareness leaflet¹

Action at Airports

13. Clearly, different airports will wish to pursue different approaches depending on their local circumstances. Working with airlines can be key to help identify the most trouble-prone flights or even to identify passengers with a history of poor behaviour, as long as concerns about privacy and proportionality are addressed.

14. Examples of some of the different approaches being taken by UK airports are:
- Glasgow and Manchester Airports in trialling the sale of duty free alcohol in sealed bags. This helps to prevent passengers drinking duty free alcohol on board aircraft.
 - Edinburgh Airport displays clear warnings about the risks of drunkenness on the airport's bars and tables. Edinburgh has formed a partnership with the airport police who now maintain a visual presence around bar areas and give potential troublemakers a gentle word of caution. It is understood that airport retailers can refuse to serve drunk passengers in the same way that a pub landlord can.
 - Gatwick Airport is the second successive year that Sussex Police has put in place extra patrols as part of "Operation Disrupt", a campaign that specifically targets problematic groups and individual travellers during the summer. Operation Disrupt runs from June 1 to September 30

15. Delegates are asked to highlight at the meeting initiatives in place at their airports that help to create the right passenger environment to reduce incidents/issues that cause stress and to manage/monitor the sale and consumption of alcohol.

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¹ <https://www.iata.org/policy/Documents/2015-Guidance-on-Unruly-Passenger-Prevention-and-Management.pdf>