

228. AIR CARRIER OPERATIONS BULLETIN NO. 1-94-27

PASSENGER SEATBELT DISCIPLINE

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The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is concerned about passengers unfastening their seatbelts when the seatbelt sign is illuminated. The Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) require air carriers to illuminate the seatbelt sign before movement on the surface, during takeoff, landing, or when in the judgment of the pilot-in-command it should be illuminated.

- a. When the seatbelt sign is turned on, crewmembers should make an announcement. The announcement should advise passengers that when the seatbelt sign is illuminated, Federal regulations require passengers to fasten their seatbelts. In addition, as long as the sign is illuminated, crewmembers should periodically remind passengers that the seatbelt sign is lighted. Additional and forceful announcements should be made if passengers stand and the seatbelt sign is illuminated. This is especially true during turbulent air operations.
- b. Many passengers regard the illumination of the seatbelt sign prior to landing as a signal to prepare for landing by going to the lavatory, standing, or stowing baggage. This is not a safe practice. Some crewmembers have adopted the practice of making an announcement prior to turning on the seatbelt sign for landing. They announce that the flight will be landing shortly, now is the time to go to the lavatory or move about the cabin, and once the seatbelt sign is illuminated, passengers should be in their seats with their belts fastened. This is a desirable practice.
- c. Illumination of the seatbelt sign prior to aircraft movement on the surface has only recently been added to the FAR. Nevertheless, historically most airlines ensured passengers were seated during movement on the surface; however, during the 1980's, at least one airline allowed its aircraft to be taxied with passengers standing. The FAA Administrator defined this practice as a careless and reckless operation. Violations were filed and upheld. Therefore, the FAA incorporated into the FAR the requirement that the seatbelt sign must be turned on prior to movement on the surface. This does not mean that pilots must stop an aircraft when a passenger stands. Pilots must weigh the safety alternatives before determining if it is appropriate to stop an airplane because a passenger has stood up during taxi. Pilots may elect to stop the aircraft when it is pulling up to a gate and several passengers stand. However, there may be other times when stopping aircraft could cause a more serious safety problem.
- d. The regulations do not require all passengers to be seated before the passenger loading door is closed. Requiring passengers to be seated before the passenger loading door is closed is one way air carriers have chosen to obtain passenger compliance with the lighted seatbelt sign. This is a good practice, but not one that is required.

- e. Crewmembers must give an announcement when the seatbelt sign is turned off inflight that passengers should keep their seatbelts fastened when seated. The requirement for this announcement should be emphasized. In addition, air carriers should be encouraged to establish additional procedures to emphasize the importance of passengers wearing their seatbelts at all times when seated. These procedures could include additional announcements, video presentations, and articles in air carrier publications or pamphlets in seat pockets.

- f. Principal operations inspectors (POI) are requested to ensure that their assigned air carriers are aware of the material in this bulletin and have procedures which ensure that passenger seatbelt announcements and discipline comply with this information. In addition, POI's should encourage air carriers to use announcement techniques that serve to forewarn passengers of pending situations that will require them to comply with the seatbelt sign when it is illuminated. Examples of these situations include expected turbulence and approaching destination. These techniques should be designed to preclude any passenger movement once the seatbelt sign is illuminated.