

AC NO: 120-34

DATE: 6/29/77



ADVISORY CIRCULAR

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

SUBJECT: AIR TRANSPORTATION OF MENTAL PATIENTS

1. PURPOSE. There are no regulatory provisions which explicitly regulate the carriage of mental patients in air transportation. This advisory circular is intended to provide guidelines to organizations and persons responsible for transportation of mental patients and outlines the responsibilities of those escorting such persons.

2. BACKGROUND. A recent incident of assault aboard an air carrier aircraft by a person under treatment for mental illness and being transported with two escorts, emphasizes the hazard involved in the transportation by air of mental patients. In this case, the patient was allowed to enter the restroom unescorted where he assaulted a young boy who was still inside.

3. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES. To achieve standardization of procedures associated with the air transportation of mental patients and reduce the probabilities of their becoming a threat to the safety of the flying public, aircraft or crew, the following procedures and guidelines are recommended for use by air carriers and institutions engaged in transfer of escorted mental patients.

a. Mental patients, for whom a competent medical authority has determined the need of an escort, should not be carried unless the following conditions are met:

(1) The air carrier should be furnished the following information at least 24 hours before planned departure unless a different notification requirement is specified by the air carrier. (In an emergency, the air carrier should be notified as soon as practical.)

(a) The identity of the escorted person and the flight on which he will be carried.

(b) Assurance by competent medical authority that a mental patient accompanied by an escort can be transported safely.

Initiated by: AFS-223

(2) The escort has assured the air carrier that:

(a) The escorted person does not have on or about his person or property an article that could be used as a deadly or dangerous weapon during flight. This includes matches and cigarette lighters.

(b) The escorted person will not be permitted to smoke unless that person is under close surveillance while smoking. Particular precautions against smoking will be taken if the mental patient is left unattended in the lavatory.

(c) The escort is equipped with adequate restraining devices to be used in the event that restraint is necessary.

b. The escorted person and escort (as far as practicable) should be:

(1) Boarded before all other passengers and deplaned after all other passengers have left the aircraft; and

(2) Seated in the rearmost passenger seats that are not located next to or directly across from any aircraft exit.

c. At least one escort should:

(1) Request the ticket or gate agent to advise the captain and senior flight attendant that an escorted mental patient is being transported.

(2) Sit between the escorted person and any aisle (however, no passenger should sit between the escorted person and the window);

(3) At all times accompany the escorted person and keep him/her under surveillance; and

(4) Make a personal inspection of the restroom (lavatory) prior to its being used by the patient and determine from the cabin attendant the best means to unlock the lavatory door from the outside.

d. The air carrier should not serve food or beverages, or provide metal eating utensils, to an escorted person unless authorized by the escort.

e. The air carrier should not serve alcoholic beverages to an escort, or the person being escorted.

f. Persons escorting mental patients are urged to follow the additional procedures below:

(1) Arrive at the airport with the patient in sufficient time before flight departure to assure a smooth process of ticketing, security check and early boarding.

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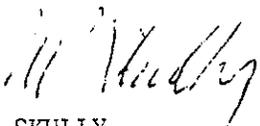
(2) In the event of an interline connection, make certain that the connecting airline is advised in ample time to implement necessary special procedures.

(3) Escorts carrying any article that may trigger the security metal detector or require a search of carry-on baggage should request assistance from security/airline personnel in clearing the passenger screening point.

(4) Escorts should possess ID credentials with full face picture, signature and official seal of the employing agency or authorizing official's signature.

(5) Brief cabin crewmembers regarding the handling of a patient in the event of an occurrence that might affect safety of the occupants.

g. Operators are urged to incorporate in their manuals specific procedures to be followed when transporting mental patients and should book them on low passenger density flights when practical.


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