

What's Up

Tom Borkowski (BOS)
US AIRWAVES Staff

Industry

According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, there is no evidence that aircraft cabin air recirculation increases the risk of passengers coming down with a head cold or other upper respiratory infections (URI). Even though the study acknowledges that the aircraft cabin may be a “high-risk” environment for transmission of infectious diseases due to factors such as confined spaces and limited ventilation, the five doctors who authored the study set out to determine whether air recirculation led to higher rates of infection. In the early 1980s, aircraft manufacturers began building ventilation systems that recirculated as much as 50 percent of the cabin air, rather than the older systems that used 100 percent fresh air—compressed, humidified, and cooled by the engine in a process that used a lot of energy. The doctors questioned 1,100 passengers traveling from the San Francisco area to Denver in the first four months of 1999. Self-reported colds occurred in 21 percent of passengers in airplanes with fresh air and 19 percent of passengers in aircraft with recirculated air. Self-reported colds and a runny nose happened in 11 percent and 10 percent of the passengers, respectively. Officials also noted that “the high incidence of subjectively reported postflight symptoms of URI in both groups may be in part due to a travel effect” involving factors such as stress, sleep loss, crowding, and poor eating.

(Aviation Daily, July 25)

Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta backed away from his usual guarantee to meet end-of-year deadlines to set up an all-federal security force to screen passengers and baggage at American airports. In testimony prepared for presentation to a House aviation subcommittee hearing, Mineta said that budgetary and other pressures have hurt the Bush administration’s efforts to meet requirements set by Congress in the wake of the September 11 attacks. “The extraordinary delay in approving emergency funding and new restrictions imposed on the TSA [Transportation Security Administration] have dramatically undermined our ability to meet this goal.” Congressional and transportation officials said that the government has hired only a fraction of the 30,000 passenger screeners needed to staff security checkpoints, and will likely fall far short of buying, installing, and testing all the thousands of explosive-detection machines required to scan bags for bombs.

(Reuters, July 23)

John Gilmore, a prominent civil libertarian and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, sued the U.S. government and United and Southwest Airlines, claiming that security requirements compelling U.S. citizens to show identification before flying are unconstitutional. The lawsuit alleges that requiring identification from travelers who are not suspected of being a threat to airport security violates several amendments to the U.S. Constitution and restricts freedom of travel, permits intrusive searches without good cause, and violates the Freedom of Information Act, because such regulations have not been published in the Federal Register. Gilmore said that he was prevented from flying on July 4 by both United and Southwest when he refused to produce ID or undergo extensive security screening. “It seemed obvious to me that the day we celebrate our freedom and independence would be a good day to see how much freedom we have left,” he said.

(Reuters, July 18)

American

The carrier said that an agreement with Switzerland's flagship airline, Swiss, will extend its routes to five international locations beginning July 31. The code sharing will start with Swiss flights from Zurich to Krakow and Warsaw in Poland and Muscat, Oman. On August 7, American will put its code on Swiss flights from Zurich to Mumbai and New Delhi in India. American and Swiss struck the code-sharing agreement in May.

(Associated Press, July 23)

American Eagle

The regional carrier will offer air travelers in the Boston-New York-Washington corridor something they have not had since Eastern Airlines launched hourly shuttle service 40 years ago, a choice among three carriers. Along with the new choice of a third carrier, passengers will also get a distinctly different kind of airplane. American Eagle will use 37- and 44-seat Embraer regional jets on routes now dominated by US Airways Shuttle's A320s and Delta Shuttle's B-737-800s. Beginning September 24, Eagle plans to operate ten flights a day each way between Boston and New York LaGuardia, followed by another ten each way between LaGuardia and Washington National on October 1. On August 1, the carrier will increase its nonstop flights between Boston and National to six daily flights each way, up from five.

(USA Today, July 23)

American Eagle said that it has agreed to get rid of 14 regional jets, eventually turning them over to Trans States Airlines, an American Connection carrier. Under a contract with the Allied Pilots Association, American Eagle can operate up to 67 aircraft with more than 44 seats. With plans to take delivery of new 70-seat Bombardier CRJ planes, Eagle would be at the cap in January. The airline was unable to reach agreement with the union to eliminate the cap.

(Associated Press, July 17)

American Trans Air

Flight 204 from Chicago to New York received an escort from two F-16 fighter jets after a passenger reported seven other travelers were behaving suspiciously, passing notes to each other and switching seats. The flight landed at LaGuardia about five minutes late, and the passengers, members of an Indian performance group, were questioned by airport police and members of the joint NYPD/FBI terrorism task force and released early the next day. "They were found to be unsuspecting," airport spokesman Alan Hicks said.

(Reuters, July 17)

American Trans Air's pilots ended more than two years of negotiations by ratifying a new four-year contract with the airline. The Air Line Pilots Association said the contract was approved by about 80 percent of the 820 eligible crewmembers who voted on the tentative agreement reached in June. Although details were not released, the union said the contract included pay increases and improvements in scheduling and job security.

(Associated Press, July 16)

Boeing

Boeing Commercial Airplanes continues efforts to fly an electric airplane demonstrator, essentially a modified motor-glider powered by a compressed-hydrogen fuel cell, and hopes someday to use fuel cells as auxiliary power units. Program managers will select components, including the airframe and fuel cell itself, later this year, striving for an inaugural flight late in 2003. A fuel cell APU—essentially a high-power, hydrogen-fueled battery with no moving parts—could provide needed electricity while reducing the load generators now place on the main engines, freeing up thrust for enhanced aircraft performance.

(Aviation Daily, July 25)



Frontier Airlines

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, representing maintenance employees in three cities, reached a tentative three-year agreement with the airline. The contract must be ratified by the 312 Frontier aircraft maintenance technicians, tool room attendants, and ground service equipment technicians in Denver, El Paso, and Phoenix. Frontier president and chief executive Jeff Potter said the contract, reached after less than a year of negotiations, is fair and helps both the airline and its maintenance workers.

(Associated Press, July 16)

Midway Airlines

The Morrisville, N.C.-based carrier, which had filed for bankruptcy last year after the September 11 attacks, has signed a letter of intent to operate as part of US Airways Express, flying a fleet of regional jets beginning in October. The eight-year agreement is subject to several conditions, including Midway's securing an additional \$5 million in capital, additional planes, and agreements with its various unions. Midway said it will eliminate the rest of its fleet of six B-737s, and furlough 400 workers.

(Associated Press, July 18)

United

The airline announced a marketing partnership with US Airways on July 24. "The agreement allows both carriers to complement their route networks in a way that will attract new traffic and boost revenue for both airlines," said United chief executive Jack Creighton. US Airways, with a strong presence on the East Coast, has long sought such a partnership to take advantage of its strength there and to try to serve customers wanting to fly out West or internationally, where United's presence is stronger.

(Associated Press, July 24)

The International Association of Machinists, representing 12,000 mechanics and 25,000 ground workers, has rejected United's proposal for a pay cut, dealing a blow to the carrier's efforts to lower costs and return to profitability. S.R. Canale, president and directing general chairman of IAM District 141, said the union rejected United's proposals because it has already agreed to defer \$498 million in retroactive pay earlier this year. "We will not allow the company to ignore the fact that IAM members at United recently agreed to defer \$498 million in retroactive pay to assist the carrier rebuild its cash position."

(Dow Jones Newswires, July 9)
