

FC5275

Posted on 31.10.2023 by Steve Forward

Category: [Flight Crew \(Commercial\)](#)

Report Title Disruptive PAX

Initial Report

I am deeply concerned about the lack of action being taken regarding disruptive passenger behaviour, fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption and drug use affecting flights to a well-known party destination in the Balearic Islands. My cabin crew are constantly having to deal with passengers who are either unable or unwilling to comply with safety instructions, or who are abusive and disruptive during the flight. While the company have made it clear that the crew are empowered to cease the sale of alcohol on board if necessary, this is totally ineffective if the majority of passengers are already intoxicated when they board the aircraft, or deceptively consume their own duty free purchases after take-off.

I have operated flights in the past where there has been so much disruption in the cabin that, had an emergency situation arisen, I very much doubt that the cabin crew would have been able to a) successfully brief the passengers for an emergency landing or b) obtain any kind of compliance or meaningful action in the event of an evacuation. Sadly, I think it's only a matter of time before an incident occurs on one of these flights and the lack of sobriety by the majority of the passengers will be the direct cause of either injury or death.

Article 242 of the ANO states that nobody must enter an aircraft while drunk or be drunk in any part of an aircraft. This is extremely difficult for the gate staff to implement if a large percentage of passengers who are boarding are intoxicated. There have been numerous attempts in the past to reduce these kinds of incidents; police presence at the departure gate, pre-flight communication to passengers regarding the potential consequences of disruptive behaviour on a commercial flight etc, most of which have done very little to improve the situation. The CAA, in conjunction with retail outlets, pubs and bars need to implement a system whereby the sale of alcohol can either be limited or withheld from customers travelling on certain routes.

Comment

Disruptive passengers are a particular problem at the moment and are recognised as such by the industry and regulator; this matter has also been discussed by the *CHIRP* Cabin Crew Advisory Board (CCAB) who have published associated comments in [Cabin Crew FEEDBACK Edition 81](#) offering practical advice about de-escalation but *CHIRP* agrees that more should be done to deny

boarding of potentially disruptive passengers in the first place. We note that the first reading of the [‘Aviation Banning Orders \(Disruptive Passengers\)’](#) Bill recently occurred in Parliament (24th May 2023) and this is intended to give some legal basis for action. However, the second reading in Parliament is not due until 24th November 2023 and so, although a welcome initiative, this is not expected to provide any productive resolution this year.

Part of the problem is that responsibilities for action are not clear: ground staff often just want to get rid of the problem by getting passengers onto the aircraft; airport bars and pubs want to maximise profits; and cabin crew are then often left to deal with the problem. As the commander of the aircraft, captains have a responsibility to support overtly and visibly (when practical) their cabin crew in the handling of disruptive passengers, and airlines could also usefully collaborate with an exclusion list such that problem passengers identified by one airline are banned from all airlines.

Within Annex 17 ‘Aviation Security’, ICAO defines a disruptive passenger as: *“A passenger who fails to respect the rules of conduct at an airport or on board an aircraft or to follow the instructions of the airport staff or crew members and thereby disturbs the good order and discipline at an airport or on board the aircraft.”* ICAO also defines a hierarchy of 4 levels of disruptive behaviour as below, and the Skybrary article [‘Unruly Passengers’](#) provides useful further material. Legal action in respect of Level 3 and 4 is probably fairly straight-forward, but Level 1 and 2 transgressions are harder to deal with legally, and the threshold for when a Level 2 transgression becomes illegal under the [Offences Against a Person Act 1861](#) is sometimes hard to determine. In regulatory terms, once the associated Aviation Banning Orders Bill mentioned above has passed through Parliament and become law, the acceptable level of evidence for legal action and bans should be clearer and more could probably be done in defining how to deal with such incidents, the powers of gate staff / cabin crew and the permitted levels of intoxication of passengers.

ICAO Hierarchy of Disruptive Behaviour

Level 1 – Disruptive Behaviour (verbal)

This can include: irrational or disorderly behaviour involving alcohol or drugs; abusive language; and defiant actions such as non-compliance with Crew Member commands.

Level 2 – Physically Abusive Behaviour

This can include: pushing; grabbing; hitting or kicking a cabin crew Member or another passenger; damage to aircraft equipment and systems; or damage to the personal effects of a Cabin Crew Member or another passenger.

Level 3 – Life Threatening Behaviour (or display of a weapon)

The involvement of a weapon in any passenger disturbance immediately increases the level of threat. A weapon is a means by which terrorists can rapidly achieve control of a

large number of passengers and cabin crew by intimidation.

The threat of a concealed weapon, the display of a weapon and the use of a weapon are all life threatening scenarios. When there is a threat of a concealed weapon cabin crew should attempt by peaceful means to confirm the existence of the weapon. When a passenger's behaviour deliberately threatens life, with or without a weapon being displayed, then the cabin crew should assume that the action may escalate into an attempted hijack. Weapons include: guns; explosives; stun guns; knives, any item incorporating a sharp point or edge; and wires and cords etc.

Level 4 – Attempted or Actual Breach of the Flight Crew Compartment

The highest level of threat is an attempted or actual breach of the flight deck, whether intended, threatened or achieved. Hijackers may concentrate on violence or the threat of violence against cabin crew and passengers in order to gain access to the flight deck, rather than an initial attempt to breach the flight deck.

Any threat or attempt to gain access to the flight deck has one purpose, to gain control of the flying of the aircraft, which may include the possibility of using the aircraft as a weapon.



