

Intoxicated Passengers

NOTE

For the purposes of this paper, **intoxicated** refers to the condition of having physical or mental control markedly diminished by the effects of alcohol and/or drugs.

For IFALPA's general position on Unruly Passengers, see [23POS06 - Unruly Passengers](#).

BACKGROUND

Two recent incidents have once again highlighted the ongoing issue of intoxicated passengers on board aircraft. On 16 May 2022, a flight originally scheduled from Gran Canaria to Newcastle was forced to divert to Porto, where a disruptive passenger was taken off the aircraft. The following day, another flight between Manchester and Faro was also forced to divert, this time to Nantes, due to the safety of the flight being compromised by five intoxicated passengers.

CURRENT SITUATION

According to IATA in 2017, "the top 3 reported issues concerning unruly behaviour relate to non-compliance with safety regulations (49%), **alcohol or other intoxication** (27%) and non-compliance with smoking regulations (24%)".

Most airlines have a so-called "zero-tolerance approach" to intoxicated passengers and their resulting disruptive behaviour, and usually initiate legal action against those passengers to recover any costs incurred, particularly when the flight results in a diversion. Diversion costs can amount to tens of thousands of Euros depending on the size of the aircraft and the destination to which it is diverted.

Due to the digitalization and automation of many processes such as online-check-in, self-check-in kiosks, and self-boarding gates, there are fewer airline personnel interacting with passengers before they board the aircraft.

Selling Alcohol on board or on airport premises (restaurants or shops) generates a significant revenue for many different stakeholders. Also, many passengers expect to be offered alcohol on board an aircraft as part of the flying experience. Some airlines have a zero-alcohol policy in effect for religious reasons.

ICAO Annex 9 (Facilitation) states:

6.44 Each Contracting State shall, to deter and prevent unruly behaviour, promote passenger awareness of the unacceptability and possible legal consequences of unruly or disruptive behaviour in aviation facilities and on board aircraft.

6.45 Each Contracting State shall take measures to ensure that relevant personnel are provided training to identify and manage unruly passenger situations.

ANALYSIS

It is difficult to predict if a passenger will follow existing safety and security regulations on board an aircraft. Recognizing drunk or intoxicated passengers before they board can significantly reduce the number of incidents related to unruly behaviour.

Personal interaction by airline and airport personnel (including service personnel in bars and shops), as well as training and awareness of the risks imposed by unruly passengers (Safety Culture) are a key element in detecting intoxicated passengers before boarding. Ever-increasing reduction of personal interaction due to automated processes weakens this most important layer.

If an intoxicated passenger is nevertheless allowed on board, either inadvertently or because their status was not immediately recognized, and the flight has already started, appropriate measures should be taken by the cabin crew. Discretion should be exercised in serving alcohol to passengers who appear intoxicated or likely to become intoxicated.

If there is any doubt, crew members should tactfully refuse to serve any more alcoholic beverages. As ICAO Doc 8973 recommends, cabin crew may also, at the discretion of the pilot-in-command and based on the perceived risk for safety, remove alcohol in the possession of a passenger, including duty-free purchases, for safe custody until the passenger disembarks.

POSITION

IFALPA believes that several preventive measures should already be in effect before a flight to avoid intoxicated passengers getting on board and leaving the problem with the crew. A robust Security Culture for all personnel working in an airport (including service personnel in bars and shops) must be created to counteract decreasing interaction between airline staff and passengers and help to identify intoxicated persons at the earliest possible stage of their journey.

Intoxicated persons should not be allowed to enter any aircraft. Excessive consumption of alcohol either before the flight or on board should not be tolerated and consumption

of alcohol on board that has not been served by cabin crew should not be authorized. These policies should be clearly communicated to passengers. Potentially disruptive passengers should not be served any alcoholic beverages. The only acceptable drugs on-board should be those used for medicinal purposes.

IFALPA strongly supports all measures designed to address this ongoing problem, including legal proceedings such as those detailed in Article 15bis of the [2014 Montreal Protocol](#) to amend the Convention on offences and certain other acts committed on board aircraft (MP14).