



Association of Professional Flight Attendants

Office of the National President

May 8, 2019

Mr. Dan Elwell
FAA Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Department of Transportation
800 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Acting Administrator Elwell:

This past weekend 41 people were tragically killed when Aeroflot Flight SU1492 made a violent emergency landing and caught fire. In the days following the accident, witness statements and video footage indicate that during the evacuation and fire in the cabin, passengers attempted to save their carry-on baggage as they struggled to exit the plane. There were numerous reports of crowded aisles and exits preventing passengers from exiting the burning aircraft. The likelihood that some passengers were intent on retrieving their carry-on luggage undoubtedly contributed to the pandemonium of a stressful and panicked emergency evacuation, and tragically may have contributed to a number of deaths. We are hopeful that there will be a rigorous investigation that includes a hard look at evacuation procedures under real-world life or death situations.

Unfortunately, this is not the first-time passengers have failed to follow the instructions of the cabin crew by attempting to take baggage out of an aircraft during an emergency evacuation. During the US Airways “Miracle on the Hudson” accident in 2009, there are pictures of evacuees on the wing of the aircraft holding backpacks and suitcases. Baggage was also an issue in the evacuation of American Airlines flight 383 in Chicago in 2017. According to NTSB records, in one case, a Flight Attendant tried to prevent a woman from taking her large bag from the overhead compartment but eventually gave up because the woman refused to leave her bag and the dispute was slowing the evacuation and putting lives at risk.

Despite regulations imposed on airlines and aircraft manufacturers to improve passenger safety during evacuations, human behavior and the chaos of an emergency creates considerable risk. Historically high load factors, smaller seat pitches and restrictive checked baggage fees (that
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have caused the unintended consequence of more luggage in the cabin) all create serious questions about the current procedures in place for when an aircraft must be quickly evacuated.

On behalf of the 28,000 members of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants, I am calling on the FAA to take action in ensuring the safety of passengers and crew members in the event of an emergency evacuation. This critical issue requires the attention of a dedicated working group to focus the aviation industry, as well as the public, on developing solutions to guarantee that carry-on baggage is not a barrier to safety during evacuations. As NTSB Chairman Sumwalt said, "Things can be replaced. People can't."

I believe this is a critical safety issue that can and should be addressed immediately. APFA stands ready to help in any way necessary. Please let me know what next steps you will be taking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lori L. Bassani". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lori L. Bassani
National President
Association of Professional Flight Attendants