

CHIRP Cabin Crew FEEDBACK

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WHY IS REPORTING SAFETY CONCERNS SO IMPORTANT?

CHIRP operates a confidential reporting programme which compliments company reporting systems and also the CAA Mandatory Occurrence Reporting system. We receive around 400 reports a year from cabin crew, flight crew, licensed maintenance personnel, air traffic control officers and General Aviation personnel who have reported safety concerns at work.

Some of the reports that we receive highlight concerns about a colleague's actions, a specific issue relating to an aircraft or an incident or safety hazard which needs to be reported to the company so that the matter can be reviewed, and if necessary, the problem rectified. If a reporter feels they cannot discuss their concerns with their company, they can give CHIRP permission to discuss them on their behalf. This may be because they feel that 'their voice is not being heard' or that they may be penalised for reporting to the company.

There is very little a company can do to rectify an issue if they do not know it is happening. From the operator's perspective, if there are little or no reports submitted to the company on a specific subject this may indicate that there are no safety concerns. Whilst we can discuss a reporter's individual concerns with the operator and/or the CAA, we do not provide any identifying information either to the company or the CAA about a specific incident (flight date, time, aircraft type, etc.) as this may infer the reporter's identity, which in turn means that the company cannot complete an in-depth investigation.

No matter how insignificant you may think the issue is, it is always better to raise your concerns, be it either with your SCCM, one of the operating flight crew, your line manager, through the company reporting programme, through CHIRP or through a Trade Union representative (if your company has one).

NOT ENOUGH O2 IN THE BOTTLE

Report Text: When completing my pre-flight checks, I noticed that one oxygen bottle was half empty when it should be 3/4 full. The oxygen was put in the tech log but I am not sure of the date of when this was completed. I also don't know how long the aircraft was flying around with an oxygen bottle half empty.

Lessons Learned - Oxygen should be replaced.

CHIRP Comment: The SCCM on the flight should have notified the cabin crew that the bottle was half empty before the crew member completed their checks. This should have been checked against what was stated in the aircraft's MEL. If the MEL stated that the aircraft was allowed to depart with the O2 bottle not full, this should have been explained to the crew member.

Immediate rectification of this may not be required, the MEL states how long that the aircraft can operate before the oxygen must be replaced.

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CHIRP, Centaur House, Ancells Business Park, Ancells Road, FLEET, GU51 2UJ
reports@chirp.co.uk

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There is a responsibility on the crew member to know that they can ask what is stated in the MEL if they are not sure.

ONBOARD PASSENGER SAFETY PROCEDURES AT OVERWING EXITS

Report Text: The company policy states that passengers may have blinds either open or closed at any stage during the flight. This includes take-off and landing and applies to all window blinds including overwing exits. Yet overwing exits are a principle point of escape from the aircraft and also a primary route in the event of a ditching event. The company identifies in its safety manuals that during an evacuation every second is crucial. As such it is the serious concern of both myself and my colleagues that by allowing overwing blinds to be closed during landing, passengers will not be able to identify quickly whether the exit is suitable for use or involves a hazard such as a fire.

Additionally for commercial reasons, passengers at over-wing exits are permitted to use personal electronic devices, noise cancelling earphones (which may be wired to a device in the seat pocket causing a trip hazard) and eye shades. All of these factors are detrimental to passenger safety and could seriously impede an orderly and expeditious escape from the aircraft. Commercial reasoning seems clearly to outweigh safety considerations onboard.

Colleagues and I have all tried to feedback our worries, only for them to be rejected outright without due consideration. There is little will now to highlight our safety issues given this atmosphere of arrogance amongst our management.

Lessons Learned - We are one of the few airlines to allow passengers to have blinds open or closed during take-off and landing. The majority of other airlines do this to increase safety awareness to passengers onboard the aircraft and specifically have a far stricter rule set for over-wing exits.

The company needs to reconsider the attitude towards safety and to adopt a sensible policy at overwing exits which respects the area as a primary escape route from the aircraft. It should also be considered whether PEDs and other items at overwing exits are truly in keeping with a safe environment during take-off and landing.

CHIRP Comment: There is no specific regulation restricting passengers' use of PEDs at seat rows providing access to emergency exits nor is there any regulation specifying the position of window blinds at emergency exits during critical phases of flight. Therefore it is up to an operator to determine through its SMS process the procedures for use of PEDs and the position of window blinds at emergency exits during all phases of flight. Noise cancelling headphones are classed as portable electronic devices (PEDs) and therefore subject to the same restrictions as any other device.

Best safety practice would be to have the window blinds open the same as at other exits but as stated above, this is up to the operator to determine. The policy would have been reviewed during routine risk assessment which would have been accepted by the UK CAA.

EASA propose to make it mandatory for all operators to have a policy on the position of window blinds and to communicate it to passengers during the safety briefing.

EMERGENCY EXIT SEATING REQUIREMENTS

Report Text: We were boarding the aircraft and the flight was meant to be full. The hand baggage (size and volume) is always challenging on this route and we tried to be as proactive as possible finding space but we were having trouble doing so.

Two passengers boarded and both were extremely large, one was having trouble breathing after walking to the aircraft. After checking that this passenger had been cleared to fly, when I returned to my position where the passenger was seated, the other large passenger had been given an emergency exit row seat. The first passenger could not fit into their middle seat and needed at least two seats and the other passenger could only sit sideways in their exit seat and did not fit well even then. We managed to move some people around to free 3 seats for the first passenger, as we were doing this the SCCM came to ask if we were ready to arm the doors for departure. I explained we were not as we were moving a passenger as well as sorting out bag stowages. We now had the issue of the obese passenger at an emergency exit seat and nowhere to move them to. The SCCM said it was not a problem as they were not obstructing the exit. I challenged this as I had just completed my annual safety check and knew this was not acceptable. They could not move very quickly (required an extension seatbelt) and their safety could be compromised as they would be unable to brace effectively.

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The SCCM did help with baggage issues, we then pushed back and armed the doors, completed the safety demo and secured the cabin. We did manage to free up an aisle seat but the passenger in the exit seat refused to move and there was no time by now to move them from the exit prior to take-off. I and another crew member were extremely unhappy with the situation and that our concerns about safety were disregarded to make an on-time departure. We were also made to feel that we did not know our safety regulations.

After take-off we persuaded the passenger to move from the door to an aisle seat. The SCCM did not speak to me about this but did look up the regulations about exit seats and told a colleague that they were vague. I have since checked and it is very clear about obese passengers.

My concern is the pressure to depart on time put on the SCCM and in turn my colleagues and myself, in a situation which compromised safety to an unacceptable level and even challenging this did not make any difference. Communication down the chain of command was poor and any back up was not well received.

Lessons Learned - In a similar situation again I would go to the Captain directly but on this flight did not feel the Captain would have been supportive.

The customer service priority was given to the premium cabins on boarding and if crew had been in the economy cabin the situation could have been dealt with quicker.

CHIRP Comment: This issue should have been picked up before the passengers boarded the aircraft as there may be few available seats that the passengers could be moved to once boarding has commenced.

As moving the passenger before pushback is the aim, the situation should be brought to the SCCM's attention) as in this case, however if the concerns raised are not understood or are ignored by the SCCM they must be raised with the Captain immediately whether or not it is felt that they will be supportive, as it is vital that all safety concerns are communicated so that a resolution can be discussed and agreed.

The UK Civil Aviation Authority advised that the following passengers should not be allocated seats by the emergency exit;

- Passengers with physical or mental impairment or disability to the extent that they would have difficulty in moving quickly if asked to do so.
- Passengers who have significant sight or hearing impairment to the extent that it might be difficult for them to respond to instructions quickly.
- Passengers who, because of age or sickness have difficulty in moving quickly.
- Passengers who, because of physical size have difficulty moving quickly.
- Children (whether accompanied or not) and infants.
- Passengers travelling with animals, for example assistance dogs.

PUSHBACK WITH PASSENGERS STANDING

This report has also been printed in Air Transport FEEDBACK Issue 119 (July 2016).

Report Text: This was an almost full flight. Most passengers had 2 pieces of hand luggage and early on during the boarding process it became evident that, as is often the case, we would struggle to accommodate all hand luggage. All available cabin crew were proactive in the cabin and assisted passengers to try and find space for their belongings. The ground staff asked to close the door almost immediately after the last passengers had boarded. At this stage there were still at least 20 people standing.

I was standing at the boarding door and approximately 30 seconds after the door closed, my colleague at the rear of the aircraft phoned to say that they had multiple pieces of hand luggage which they couldn't stow and lots of passengers still standing. It was impossible to reach the SCCM as she was stuck in the cabin between passengers trying to stow bags. I proceeded immediately to the flight deck, with the flight deck door still open, and told the Captain the situation in the cabin, clearly stating that we had lots of passengers still standing and we were struggling to stow all hand luggage. They asked us to do our best and keep them posted. Approximately 90 seconds later I noticed the flight deck door was closed and felt the aircraft pushback. At this stage we still had around 10 passengers standing and 50% of the overhead lockers still open. We eventually managed to stow all bags in wardrobes as there was no alternative. I would estimate everyone was seated and bags stowed approximately 3-4 minutes after pushback commenced.

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The SCCM discussed the situation with the Captain after take-off and the obvious safety implications of pushing back with passengers still standing. The Captain claimed not to know that there was still anyone standing even though I physically went into the flight deck and told them just moments before pushback. I felt let down that the Captain had disregarded my information and chose to push back the aircraft and endanger the passengers and crew still standing.

Lessons Learned - If the cabin crew tell the flight crew that there are still passengers standing in the cabin, then do not move the aircraft! I appreciate the pressures of on time departures, however safety is and should always be our top priority.

CHIRP Comment: CHIRP's view is that passengers should normally be seated and secured prior to pushback. There is no EASA definition of taxiing, however the Oxford English Dictionary defines taxiing: 'of an aeroplane, etc., or its pilot: to travel slowly along the ground or water under the machine's own power'.

Under EASA, pushback and towing are addressed under:

CAT.OP.MPA.205 Pushback and Towing – aeroplanes

Pushback and towing procedures specified by the operator shall be conducted in accordance with established aviation standards and practices.

Although not stated, it would be surprising if these standards and procedures were significantly different from those governing taxiing which require:

CAT.OP.MPA.225 Seats, safety belts and restraint systems

(b) *Passengers*

(1) Before take-off and landing, and during taxiing, and whenever deemed necessary in the interest of safety, the commander shall be satisfied that each passenger on board occupies a seat or berth with his/her safety belt or restraint system properly secured.

Each operator will have an approved procedure which will be stated in the Operations Manual. Cabin crew should follow this procedure and advise the Captain if there are any related problems which might delay the cabin being secured for take-off, so appropriate action can be taken.

Reports received by CHIRP are accepted in good faith. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of editorials, analyses and comments published in FEEDBACK, please remember that CHIRP does not possess any executive authority.

Contact Us

Stephanie Colbourne - Cabin Crew Programme Manager

CHIRP, Ancells Business Park, Ancells Road, FLEET, GU51 2UJ

Freephone (UK only): 0800 772 3243 or Telephone: +44 (0) 1252 378947

E-mail: reports@chirp.co.uk

Registered in England No: 3253764

Registered Charity: 1058262



Captain Karim Sachedina

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Captain Karim Sachedina in August 2016. Karim was a Captain with Monarch Airlines when he joined the CHIRP Cabin Crew Advisory Board (CCAB) in 2004 to contribute a flight crew perspective to the assessment of cabin crew reports. He became Vice-Chairman of the CCAB in 2010 and continued in this capacity until 2014. He also served on the Air Transport Advisory Board from 2011 to 2015.

Throughout his time on the Boards his expert contribution was invaluable and he was noted for the warmth, sense of humour and sympathy that were his natural characteristics. We are hugely grateful for the support he generously gave to CHIRP and wish all his family, friends and colleagues our heartfelt sympathy on his passing.



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