

CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



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CREW MANAGEMENT OF PASSENGER CIRCUMSTANCES



Perplexing passenger circumstances can exist in all shapes and sizes and may develop quickly during flight operations. While many passenger situations are routine, some may be uncommon or even unique. Many pilots and flight attendants have encountered unusual passenger situations that they never would have imagined. Passenger incidents could include illness, injury, misconduct, medical problems, baggage issues, intoxication, confrontation, threatening behavior, or other rare conditions.

Dealing with distinct passenger events may require creative problem solving techniques, clear judgment, quick decisions, and exceptional Crew Resource Management (CRM) by everyone involved, especially if a situation is not addressed by FAR, company policy, or the Quick Reference Handbook (QRH). Teamwork is a must.

This month *CALLBACK* shares six perspectives on one passenger incident and the responsive actions the crew took. Each reporter's individual account and actions during this single incident may stimulate strong and differing opinions. The ability of ASRS to capture and portray an event from multiple perspectives may, however, provide more clarity to the event than the view perceived through any single lens. Our intent is to illustrate the complexity and urgency that a passenger situation may present to a crew and to stimulate constructive discussion regarding crew actions when dealing with passenger circumstances.

The Crew Debriefing

This air carrier crew was caught off-guard by a passenger situation just prior to initiating the takeoff. Ensuing communications, misinformation, confusion, assumptions, and decisions at a critical time resulted in a less than desirable outcome that had the potential to become much worse.

From the First Officer's Report:

■ *The aircraft was in position on the runway for takeoff. A Flight Attendant called and said that they had a problem with a passenger and that they would get back to us. The Flight Attendant then called a second time shortly thereafter saying that they had a passenger who was afraid to fly and wanted to get off the aircraft, and that we needed to go back to the gate.... Flight Attendant B was on the phone relaying information to the Captain. I was monitoring Tower as we were awaiting takeoff clearance and was not in on this phone*

conversation. I asked the Captain if [the Captain] wanted me to get clearance to clear the runway. [The Captain] said, "No, stay on the runway and see how long it takes to get our takeoff clearance." Our takeoff clearance came quickly from the Tower, and the Captain said that we were going and pushed the throttles up for takeoff. We found out later in flight that the passenger in question and two or three Flight Attendants were standing in the cabin during takeoff.

This event occurred because sufficient time was not taken to address the Flight Attendants' concerns about this passenger. Adherence to Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) procedures and taking time to address problems on the ground would have prevented this issue.

From the Captain's Report:

■ *While on the runway waiting for takeoff clearance from Tower, the [Purser] called the cockpit and reported to the [Relief Pilot] that they had a panicking passenger who wanted to get off the airplane. I told the Flight Attendant B to tell them that we were on the runway and that it's too late to get off. [I said,] "We are taking off now."*

After takeoff, the Flight Attendant notified me that they were in the aisle still standing when the takeoff was initiated. I informed them that I was unaware that anyone was standing at the time and that they should have been more specific as to the situation. I believe that, [because]...Flight Attendant B was on the phone relaying the message,...the communication may have been confused or omitted.

The specifics of the situation were not properly communicated, or the specifics did not get communicated because...the [Relief Pilot] was taking the call and transferring the information to me. The [Relief Pilot] also told me that [the Relief Pilot] was unaware of people standing at the time.

From the Relief Pilot's Report:

■ *I was the [Relief Pilot] and was sitting in the First Observer's seat. In the takeoff position shortly after being cleared for takeoff, the Purser called the cockpit. The First Officer (FO) took [that] call and reported that there was a problem with a passenger and that they'd call back. I answered the next call. The Flight Attendant reported that a passenger wanted to get off the plane immediately and was very upset. I reported this to the Captain after I told the*

Flight Attendant that I'd call back in a moment. There was very little cockpit discussion before I called to the back to get a status on the passenger. I was informed, I believe, by the Purser that the passenger was adamant about getting off the airplane.

The Purser stated that we needed to go back to the gate and remove the passenger. I hung up the phone and related verbatim what was said to me by the Purser. At that point, the Captain stated that we weren't going back to the gate for that and, without hesitation or further discussion, pushed up the power, [engaged the autothrottles], and off we went.

From the Purser's Report:

■ During taxi a passenger approached [the door] and stated that [the passenger] must deplane. The passenger was suffering and showing signs of anxiety and panic attack. The passenger continued to insist [that the passenger] must deplane and could not travel. [I] made a call to the cockpit to advise [the Captain] of the situation. [I] advised that I was experiencing a situation in the cabin with a passenger unable to go through with travel who was experiencing and exhibiting extreme anxiety and panic. I further advised my assessment that we needed to return to the gate. The response was affirmative. Thinking that arrangements were being made to return to the gate, I and two other Flight Attendants continued to calm the passenger in efforts to get [the passenger] back to a seat as we taxied to the gate. The next thing I knew, the engines were revving, and we were speeding down the runway for takeoff while I, the passenger, and two other Flight Attendants were standing in the galley in total shock...and attempting to secure ourselves. As soon as we were able, [we] assisted the passenger to the closest empty passenger seat, and I took my jumpseat.

What could prevent this from occurring in the future, in my opinion, would be better communication coming from the cockpit in determining the current condition of a special situation occurring in the cabin before forging ahead with the decision to take off.

From the B Flight Attendant's Report:

■ As we were taxiing out for takeoff,... a passenger was emotionally distressed and approached Flight Attendant A at Door 2L. [The passenger] told [Flight Attendant A] that [the passenger] wanted to get off the aircraft and was having a panic attack. I was Flight Attendant B.... I went to [the Purser] and informed [the Purser] of the situation. [The Purser] then called the Captain to inform [the Captain]. I went back to Door 2L and tried to calm [the passenger]... down. [The passenger] was trembling and crying. The

[Purser] was with me in the mid-galley when Flight Attendant [E] came and told us that the Captain informed them [that] we were taking off. We instantly took off! We seated the passenger in the nearest available seat. We didn't have time to sit in our jumpseats.

From the E Flight Attendant's Report:

■ A passenger suffered an extreme panic attack during the takeoff phase and wanted to get off the airplane. The passenger was standing in the business class galley assisted by Flight Attendant A and the Purser. The passenger did not speak any English, and I assisted with translation. The Pilots were advised of the situation, but the takeoff went on with the three Flight Attendants and the passenger standing in the business class galley. Quickly we moved the passenger to the nearest open seat.

NASA ASRS Director's Retirement

After 37 years at NASA Ames Research Center and 21 years as NASA ASRS Director, I have decided to retire from government civil service at the end of February. It has been my distinct honor and pleasure to work with the amazing aviation safety community that includes so many colleagues and friends from the FAA, the NTSB, and the numerous organizations that represent all of you who report to the ASRS. It has been my privilege to work with the dedicated staff of the ASRS, who commit themselves each day to discovering the safety gems hidden in the multitude of reports sent to the ASRS from pilots, controllers, dispatchers, flight attendants, maintenance technicians, ground workers, and others. I have been fortunate to convey the concept of confidential safety reporting to aviation organizations both in this nation and in other countries and industries. To all of you everywhere with whom I have crossed paths, I will miss you dearly. I thank each and every one of you for your tireless contributions to the process of improving aviation safety, and I support you and your efforts to continue the important work of transforming safety information into safety changes that will prevent accidents.

My sincerest regards,
Linda Connell

ASRS Alerts Issued in 2017	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or Aircraft Equipment	19
Airport Facility or Procedure	10
ATC Equipment or Procedure	16
Company Policy	2
Hazard to Flight	2
Other	2
TOTAL	51

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A Monthly Safety
Newsletter from
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Aviation Safety
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December 2017 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	4,617
General Aviation Pilots	1,042
Controllers	476
Flight Attendants	409
Military/Other	306
Mechanics	193
Dispatchers	145
TOTAL	7,188