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US raises the alarm about toxic fumes aboard aircraft

Has ordered new procedures for reporting toxic fumes in cabins and flight decks

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•Please contact me if you have knowledge of any kind about toxic fumes in aircraft, [e-mail ash@dagbladet.no](mailto:ash@dagbladet.no).

(Dagbladet.no:) In contrast with the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the American Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) believes that under-reporting of toxic fume incidents is a major problem. The FAA made this crystal clear as recently as 8 June this year at the US/Europe International Aviation Safety Conference.

“The FAA is becoming increasingly concerned by numerous reports of smoke or gasses on flight decks and in passenger cabins. Our analyses of the data indicate that a large number of such incidents are not reported,” stated Jim Ballough, the FAA’s Director of Flight Standards Service, at the conference.

Will put pressure on the airlines

On 29 March this year, the FAA sent out a so-called FSAW (Flight Standards Information Bulletin for Airworthiness), requiring the industry to introduce new reporting routines for incidents involving smoke or fumes in passenger cabins and on flight decks:

- Maintenance personnel must determine whether that the airlines have adequate procedures for reporting, investigating, and following up these incidents.
- Every toxic fume incident must be followed up to determine whether the airlines’ routines are effective.
- Every incident of this type must be logged, so that complete and accurate data are made available for analysis and monitoring of development trends.

“The new guidelines will apply to all reported incidents involving smoke or fumes on flight decks or in passenger cabins occurring while an aircraft is in service,” the FAA emphasises.

Pilots threatened to silence

As early as October 2000 a senate hearing in Australia concluded that many toxic fume incidents aboard aircraft are not being reported to the authorities.

The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee found evidence that pilots and crew are failing to report toxic fume incidents for the following reasons:

- **Pilots and crew would jeopardise their careers if they reported such incidents to the airline or authorities.**
- **Many pilots and crew members have been told by the airlines that the fumes are not a danger to health.**

American and Australian authorities therefore believe that under-reporting is a major aircraft safety problem. This is in stark contrast with the attitude of the CAA in the United Kingdom. Last week the CAA told Dagbladet.no that they have no reason to believe that widespread under-reporting goes on in Britain. The British authorities maintain this point of view despite the fact that the American aviation authorities have raised the alarm.

“Hundreds of incidents”

“Just because other countries believe under-reporting takes place does not mean that we have widespread problems of this nature. The US and Australia have different types of report forms from

those we use. As I have pointed out before, our reporting system is believed to be the best in the world,” says Jonathan Nicholson, spokesman for the CAA, to Dagbladet.no.

“The US and Australia also have statutory reporting obligations with regard to toxic fumes in passenger cabins and on flight decks. What makes the CAA so sure that British airlines are better at complying with the regulations?”

“Different countries have different reporting cultures, but of course the fact remains that if an airline does not forward a report on a toxic fume incident to us, we will not have knowledge of that incident,” says Nicholson.

“As you are aware, the FAA has now ordered new reporting routines and requires that all incidents involving fumes or smoke on flight decks or in passenger cabins must be reported. Will this also be the case in the United Kingdom?”

“Not for the time being. Our database contains hundreds of incidents involving smoke or fumes on flight decks and in cabins, by far the majority of which are considered insignificant incidents. According to our legislation there is no requirement for reporting if crew members have not experienced discomfort and if no faults have been discovered in the aircraft,” Nicholson points out.

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