

The Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP
10 Downing Street
London,
SW1A 2AA

Monday 3 August 2009

Passenger Carrying Aircraft: Contaminated Cabin Air

Dear Prime Minister,

During a debate on Air Quality (Aircraft), in Westminster Hall on 1 July 2009, Tobias Ellwood MP said:

"Clear evidence demonstrates that there is a design fault in passenger aircraft that puts passengers and crew at risk from fumes, yet the CAA and the Government continue to allow that situation to go unchecked."

The breathing air supplied to passengers and crews on all commercial and most military transport aircraft, designed since the early 1960s, has been taken from the compression section of the engine and delivered to the passenger cabin and cockpit completely unfiltered. This air, known as 'bleed air' as it is 'bled' off the engine, can at times become contaminated with both jet engine oils and hydraulic fluids due to poor engine design, poor maintenance or system malfunction.

When the bleed air is contaminated it will contain numerous toxic and hazardous chemicals. Many of these chemicals, such as carbon monoxide, or the neurotoxic and immunotoxic organophosphate tricresyl phosphate, are odourless and colourless. This contaminated air, inhaled by passengers and crew, can then lead not only to a flight safety hazard but also to short and long term health effects. Contaminated air exposures may also be adversely effecting gene expression in those exposed or the offspring of those exposed.

Mr Maples MP and Mr Ellwood MP both asked your Transport Minister a question on 1 July which we have been asking the Government for nearly 10 years, a question that remains unanswered:

"I would also like to know what steps the Minister will take to ensure that passengers are informed when they have been exposed to a contamination event."

Aircraft regulations clearly state that:

“Each crew compartment must have enough fresh air to enable crewmembers to perform their duties without undue discomfort or fatigue”

and

"Crew and passenger compartment air must be free from harmful or hazardous concentrations of gases or vapours.”

but as hazardous concentrations of gasses and vapours are not monitored onboard, no aircraft has any form of detection systems fitted, compliance to these regulations cannot possibly be ensured.

Crew and passengers, including those yet born, are not only being put at risk every day but of great concern to us is the fact that no UK airline informs its passengers when they have been exposed to contaminated air. This is clearly a breach of their basic human rights.

For ten years we have striven, without success, to make certain this Government ensure all passengers and crews are informed when they have been exposed to contaminated air. Surely airlines should be instructed to inform all passengers and crews, some of them from your electorate, when they have been exposed to contaminated air. Additionally, that short and long term medical surveillance and support should subsequently be provided.

It has become clear that civil servants preparing the answers to hundreds of questions raised on these matters in the Commons, and in the Lords, are frequently providing you and MPs with inaccurate and misleading information. It is hard to reconcile this action with the core values of the Civil Service –honesty, impartiality, integrity and objectivity.

We seek your personal support to ensure the Government misinformation campaign is brought to an end and that the serious health and flight safety issues we raise are properly addressed.

May I venture to suggest you personally review the information contained in the 90 minute documentary film I made entitled ‘Welcome Aboard Toxic Airlines.’ The film was sent earlier this year to every peer and MP in the United Kingdom and continues to be broadcast internationally.

I am available to meet with you and discuss these matters at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Captain Tristan Loraine
Co-Chairman GCAQE