



A *CUPE* Occupational Health & Safety Publication  
*For you, the members!*

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## *Air Quality*

Dear member,

Lately there has been a lot of talk about cabin air quality, and members have requested information from the union. Therefore, for the second-to-last In-Touch bulletin of 2011, your health and safety committees felt it would be appropriate to update you on the issue and remind you of what you can do if you feel the air on your flight is contaminated.

### *Air Quality in the News...*

In June of this year, a former American Airlines flight attendant named Terry Williams reached an out-of-court settlement with Boeing Co. over allegations she suffered irreparable injuries due to contaminated cabin air. This settlement comes on the heels of last year's landmark decision which was handed down by the High Court of Australia in which damages were awarded to Joanne Turner, a former Ansett Australia flight attendant. She had been exposed to oil fumes stemming from a faulty seal in the APU of the BAE-146 aircraft operating between Sydney and Brisbane.

Read more about these stories as well as other Air Quality news by following this link:

<http://www.aerotoxic.org/news-and-articles/latestnews>

### *What is being done?*

Your CUPE health and safety representatives are always available to you and continue to advocate air quality issues on your behalf. In addition, your union has an air quality specialist who liaises with other airline labour organizations, coordinating campaigns, and bringing updates to members on a regular basis through Air Quality bulletins. This is important since, like all other health and safety issues, the first step is to be informed of the facts so that it can be properly identified and reported.

## **Want to catch-up on bulletins past?**

While the global fight against toxic cabin air is picking up speed, the signs of oil and hydraulic fluid contaminating the cabin air have not changed, nor have the steps the union recommends you undertake to ensure your own safety. ***We encourage you to review the following information compiled from previous bulletins.***

## **Your workplace, Your air, Your health:**

1. If oil fumes contaminate the cabin air supply, you may smell and see fumes, or you may not.
2. If you do smell fumes, they won't necessarily smell like oil. Many people think that they smell like dirty socks. Others say "chemicals", "old cheese", "wet dog", "heated garbage", and so on. Boeing has reported that BP2197 engine oil fumes have a characteristic "electrical smell", often mistaken for electrical faults.
3. If you smell what could be oil fumes, and are already onboard, quickly verify that nobody is cooking anything, that the coffee pots are not burning, that the cabin lights are working and are not burned out, and that the galley chiller lights are not indicating malfunction (red).
4. Tell the flight deck that it appears that engine oil has contaminated the supply air. Describe anything that you see / smell, plus any symptoms, and report that you have ruled out other sources in the cabin (if applicable).
5. If fumes are present prior to pushback, ask the flight deck to have maintenance check the aircraft prior to dispatch. If fumes are present during taxi, make sure that the flight deck knows. If fumes are present in-flight, ask the flight deck to ensure that maintenance checks the aircraft immediately upon landing. (The pilots may initiate a diversion, or return to base.)

While repeated low level exposures and major "fume events" (when oil mixes with the very hot compressed air, resulting in fumes or smoke entering the cabin) have been linked to increased environmental sensitivity, and are believed to cause the onset of serious health problems, it is the combination of multiple exposures and the interaction of the multiple chemicals which have contributed to the new condition known as "Aerotoxic Syndrome." This is often misdiagnosed

because short and long term symptoms for multiple body parts are treated in isolation, instead of as a whole. Symptoms may include:

- Fatigue - feeling exhausted, even after sufficient sleep
  - Blurred or tunnel vision
  - Shaking and tremors
  - Loss of balance and vertigo
  - Seizures
  - Light-headedness, dizziness or loss of consciousness
  - Memory impairment, confusion and other cognitive problems
  - Headache
  - Tinnitus
  - Feelings of intoxication
  - Nausea, diarrhea or vomiting
  - Breathing difficulties or respiratory failure requiring oxygen
  - Tightness in chest, including increased heart rate and palpitations
  - Irritation of eyes, nose and upper airways, or coughs
6. If you suffer from any of the above listed symptoms after a “fume event”, **you should report it immediately to a medical doctor**. Symptoms may be short lived or long term. These are not concerns, they are injuries.
7. Fill out an ACF34C to report the incident, and an ACF32-8 to report any medical symptoms or injuries. ***Remember to send a copy of these forms to your Local CUPE Health and Safety representative.***

### **For those wanting to know more about this issue...**

The Aerotoxic Association has compiled a thorough list of weblinks, documents, and testimonials. Amongst these, the following may be of particular interest due to the fact that they were sponsored by the FAA and U.S. Department of Transport respectively. *You may want to bring a copy with you should you need to see a physician.*

- ***Exposure to Bleed Air Contaminants Among Airline Workers - A Guide for Health Care Providers – Funded by the FAA Office of Aviation Medicine. April 2009 Version.***

[http://www.aerotoxic.org/download/docs/medical\\_help/Medicalprotocol031909.pdf](http://www.aerotoxic.org/download/docs/medical_help/Medicalprotocol031909.pdf)

- **Health Impact of exposure to contaminated air supply on commercial aircraft – Quick reference guide for health care providers. From the Occupational Health Research Consortium in Aviation**

<http://www.ohrca.org/pdf/quickreference.pdf>

- **Aerotoxic Association**

<http://www.aerotoxic.org>

- **Occupational Health Research Consortium in Aviation**

<http://www.ohrca.org>

Your health and safety is our priority,

**Air Canada Component of CUPE Occupational Health and Safety Committees**



Julie Pelletier



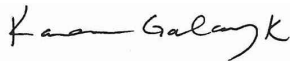
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