

Original article in Dutch:

[PILOTENKOEPEL SLAAT ALARM OVER GEVAARLIJKE STOFFEN IN DE COCKPIT](#) by Paul Eldering.

Translation: Stichting Fly Aware

PILOT ASSOCIATION SOUNDS THE ALARM ABOUT DANGEROUS FUMES IN THE COCKPIT



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MONTREAL - A quick solution is urgently needed for the dangerous fumes to which pilots and cabin crews are exposed. This is the position taken by the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Associations (IFALPA), representing approximately 110,000 pilots in over 70 countries. This is the first time such a stance has been taken on the issue of the so-called aerotoxic syndrome.

Until now, most pilot unions have been relatively cautious when it comes to the possibility of ATS, the so-called aerotoxic syndrome. Due to regular exposure to neurotoxic compounds (TCPs) in leaking oil from the engines used for cabin air circulation during flights, some pilots, cabin crew, and frequent flyers who are genetically predisposed to it could become chronically ill or even face fatal consequences over time.

It appears that IFALPA is now wholeheartedly acknowledging this problem, which often occurs during "fume events" (smoke and foul odors) on board. The publication also clearly reflects a call for action. "Pilots can be severely impaired in their duties and may sometimes be temporarily unable to function effectively in the cockpit due to the inhalation of these toxic fumes. The long-term effects are still not adequately understood, but they do cause us increasing concerns."

Medical protocol

Therefore, IFALPA advocates for better legal support and enforcement concerning the potential adverse effects of bleed air, increased training for crews on this topic (already a recommendation of the National Advisory Group Cabin Air NAC in the Netherlands), a standard reporting system, and a global medical protocol. This brings the recognition of ATS as an occupational disease one step closer.

IFALPA also advocates for the quick installation of sensors and filters in aircraft to detect oil leaks in bleed air and harmful substances in the cabin and cockpit. "Furthermore, TCP-free oil should be developed and certified and implemented everywhere. In short, action is needed to prevent exposure to contaminated air," as stated in the report.

According to IFALPA, among pilots and cabin crew, neurological, cognitive, and psychological complaints, as well as respiratory issues, fatigue, and skin irritations have been reported. "These symptoms may also develop over time. Associations between bleed air and these symptoms are becoming more likely."

The Boeing 787 Dreamliner is one of the few aircraft types that do not use bleed air, thus eliminating the ATS risk. IFALPA calls on the industry to increasingly implement alternative air circulation techniques in pressurized cabins in the future, even if it takes time. In the meantime, engine air could be filtered.

FlyAware: Turning Point

Annie de Vries from the Stichting FlyAware, which has been advocating for the recognition of ATS as an occupational disease, the universal implementation of an

effective medical protocol, and the reduction of health issues for years, describes this as 'a positive turning point.' According to her, IFALPA is more or less on board. "A cautious shift in the typically rigid stance of aviation industry stakeholders so far," she says.

Previously, according to De Vries, it was always argued that there was no proven causal link between contaminated bleed air and ATS symptoms, and therefore more scientific research was necessary before drawing definitive conclusions. "From this IFALPA opinion, there does appear to be a certain recognition that something is indeed going on, for which preventive measures might still be advisable," she believes.

According to her, five years ago, the pilot federation did not express itself so clearly about the possible safety risks. "And steps to reduce them: filters and sensors, a robust medical protocol, training, and reporting. Apparently, there is - fortunately - evidence of evolving insight regarding the desired healthy working environment for the crew," De Vries said.

According to her, it is finally being recognized by IFALPA that in the daily flight operations, there is almost always some degree of oil leakage. Although authorities typically categorize this as "within the legal margins of safety and health."

Technicians are also concerned

Recently, Robert Swankhuizen, the chairman of the Dutch Association of Aviation Technicians NVLT and a member of NAC, expressed concerns about exposure to toxins in and around aircraft engines. "This also affects technicians. The aerotoxic syndrome is looming as an occupational disease, although extensive research is still being conducted to establish precise scientific correlations. These are expected to be found on the shop floor," he said.

According to him, it's not just about TCPs but many other harmful substances. "We want the recently internationally agreed medical protocol to be included in an NAC recommendation to the minister as soon as possible so that victims receive legal support and access to specialized help and care," Swankhuizen added.

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