

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 19, 2019

Mr. Robin Hayes
Chief Executive Officer
JetBlue Airways Corporation
27-01 Queens Plaza North
Long Island City, New York 11101

Dear Mr. Hayes:

As sponsors of the *Cabin Air Safety Act of 2019* (S. 1112/H.R. 2208), we write to express our deep concern regarding the significant number of cabin air safety events JetBlue aircraft have experienced over the past several months. These events pose a significant health risk to in-flight crewmembers and passengers – placing your employees and customers in harm’s way. On behalf of our constituents and the traveling public, we ask that you clarify JetBlue’s procedures for identifying and addressing these events, and inform us of what steps your company is taking to prevent these incidents from occurring on your aircraft.

Malfunctions in engines, auxiliary power units, or elsewhere in aircraft air supply systems can leak potent chemicals into the cabins of commercial aircraft. When this happens, these chemicals can gasify, turning into neurotoxins, such as tricresyl phosphates (TCPs), with dangerous health effects including nerve damage, muscle weakness, fatigue, and problems with memory, concentration, and speech. Engine oil and hydraulic fluid also produce carbon monoxide, which causes dizziness and fatigue even after relatively short exposures. Long-term exposure to these toxins, even at trace levels, is linked to debilitating health issues.

Over the past few months, there have been several reports of JetBlue aircraft experiencing severe fume events during flight. While many of these events did not make headlines, at least one of your aircraft reportedly made an emergency landing¹ and at least three separate flight crews have gone to the hospital due to toxic cabin air. All of these crewmembers tested positive for increased levels of carbon monoxide and some have suffered additional health problems, including significant issues which required hospitalization. Unfortunately, these are

¹ Mark Sundstrom, “JetBlue flight leaving Newark diverted to JFK after ‘unusual odor’ sickens passengers, crew,” *WPIX* (New York, NY), July 14, 2019, <https://pix11.com/2019/07/14/jetblue-flight-leaving-newark-airport-diverted-to-jfk-after-unusual-odor-sickens-passengers-crew/>.

not isolated incidents and may be indicative of a disturbing pattern of fume events onboard JetBlue aircraft.²³

To better understand this issue, we would appreciate your responses to the following questions:

- How many fume events have occurred on JetBlue aircraft this year? Is this number higher than last year?
- Has JetBlue identified the cause of these events? What steps is your company taking to prevent them?
- What reporting processes does JetBlue currently have in place to know when a fume event is happening or has occurred? What standard operating procedure is in place for reacting to fume events? What is your procedure for following up with flight crews and passengers who have experienced a fume event?
- When crewmembers suffer health effects from fume events, including hospitalization, what policies does JetBlue have in place to help these individuals fully recover and resume work? Are crewmembers required to use any vacation or sick time to recover from illnesses or injuries suffered in relation to these events?

Lastly, we would like to note that the proper term for these events is either “fume event” or “cabin air safety event”. There have been reports that your company is reclassifying these as “odor events” in an apparent attempt to skirt Federal Aviation Administration reporting standards, as well as state and local workers’ compensation laws. This raises significant doubt regarding JetBlue’s intention to faithfully adhere to existing health, safety, and labor law. We trust that you will ensure that your company is complying with these laws.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response to the above questions.

Sincerely,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate


JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress

² Howard Cohen, “Fumes force JetBlue to make an emergency landing return trip to Orlando,” *Miami Herald* (Miami, FL), January 30, 2019, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/article225279170.html>.

³ Ashley Soley-Cerro, “JetBlue plane makes emergency landing in NYC on Christmas Eve due to ‘unusual odor’ officials,” *WPIX* (New York, NY), December 24, 2018, <https://pix11.com/2018/12/24/jetblue-plane-makes-emergency-landing-in-nyc-on-christmas-eve-due-to-unusual-odor-officials/>.