

Safety & Security Concerns over large Personal Electronic Devices as Checked Baggage

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Two states – including the United Kingdom – recently introduced a ban on large Personal Electronic Devices (PEDs) in the passenger cabin of aircraft operating on specific routes or from certain countries. This ban will increase significantly the number of such devices (computers, tablets, cameras, etc.) – which usually are powered by lithium batteries – to be placed in checked baggage. Airlines may collect these devices, just before boarding, and carry them in the hold as a single package.

ECA, representing 38.000 pilots from 37 European states, is seriously concerned about the potential negative safety implications of this ban, as well as about additional security risks that may be introduced. ECA therefore calls for an effective and comprehensive security and safety risk assessment to be carried out without delay, to ensure the ban does not create safety and security threats greater than the one it seeks to prevent.

Lithium batteries are commonly used in laptops and many other electrical devices. While it is quite rare, these batteries can be subject to thermal runaway and spontaneous ignition. Such fires are very difficult to extinguish. As a consequence, it has been made a recommendation that carriage of shipments, by air, of large numbers of lithium batteries is strictly controlled.

The new ban on PEDs in the passenger cabin therefore has the potential to create safety risks that could prove to be more harmful than allowing passengers to carry them as hand baggage. With current airplane cargo hold fire suppression systems, it might prove to be impossible to extinguish a lithium battery fire in the cargo hold, especially when the batteries are stored together. Therefore, any event of this nature during flight would more than likely be catastrophic. (*see also IFALPA Safety Bulletin [17SAB04](#)*). Implementing specific operational procedures, aimed at mitigating a security threat but which risks degrading flight safety is not an acceptable way forward.

In the addition to the safety concerns, ECA is concerned that the new process provides a predictable mechanism whereby a prepared PED could be placed into the cargo hold together with a large number of lithium batteries (contained in other PEDs) in order to trigger a disastrous event.

ECA is seeking assurances that an effective and comprehensive security and safety risk assessment has been carried out, or will be carried out without delay. – If the threat is truly real and immediate then PEDs of interest should be removed from the aircraft entirely.

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