

CALLBACK



From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System

Number 349

January 2009

What Would You Have Done?



Back again, by popular request, is another “interactive” issue of *CALLBACK*. In response to suggestions that we make these issues more interactive, you will find several plausible answer choices following each incident excerpt on the front page. On the back page, you will find the “rest of the story” – the actions actually taken by reporters to resolve their situations. Keep in mind that reporters’ actions may not always represent optimal safety solutions, and that these incidents are intended to foster further thought and discussion.

What would you have done?

- Explain the problem to ATC and move the aircraft to a holding area
- Delay accepting the takeoff clearance until the passenger could be seated
- Accept the takeoff clearance and taxi very slowly into position
- ????

Situation #1: “I Was Quickly Running Out of Options” (GA Pilot)

■ I received standard weather briefings via DUATS for my route...My interpretation was that it was to be a CAVU day along my entire route...I called Approach and obtained VFR flight following...I did not check the weather again before departing. Approaching the mountains...at 8,500 feet MSL, I observed what appeared to be poor visibility under the clouds...I informed ATC that I was climbing to 10,500 feet MSL. When I reached that altitude...I thought after I cleared a ‘line of clouds’ I would be able to descend. However, it became apparent that the overcast was somewhat widespread, the tops continued to rise, and I soon found myself climbing to 12,500 feet...I was wary of climbing higher, given the oxygen requirements, which I was aware of [and] I was concerned about possible effects of hypoxia...However, the cloud tops continued to rise, and I continued to climb to 14,000 feet...I was approaching the service ceiling of my aircraft and thus quickly running out of options to avoid the clouds....

What would you have done?

- Turn back towards the departure airport
- Confess the dilemma to ATC
- Declare an emergency
- ????

Situation #2: “We Simultaneously Received Two Calls” (Air Carrier Flight Crew)

■ As we were holding short of Runway 7L and #1 for takeoff, we simultaneously received 2 calls: one from the aft flight attendant stating that a passenger had just gotten up and was going to the lavatory, and a second from the Tower clearing us into position and hold Runway 7L. I was off of Com #1 and speaking with the flight attendant while the Captain was communicating with the Tower....

Situation #3: “The Pilot Lost All Avionics” (Air Traffic Controller)

■ While working the West Arrival position, I accepted a handoff of a DH8 [turboprop] on the ABC arrival from the Center. The aircraft had no Mode C displayed but our Letter of Agreement with the Center requires props on the arrival to be at 11,000 feet and jets at 12,000 feet. When the aircraft checked in, I confirmed his altitude and informed the pilot his Mode C was not working and asked him if any other controllers had mentioned this to him. The pilot stated that no one had informed him and they were trying to recycle the transponder. I instructed the pilot to descend and maintain 9,000 feet and to report reaching. The pilot then informed me that he was getting an error message on the TCAS regarding lack of altitude. I issued the pilot an instruction and when he responded I heard the 1,000 feet-to-go warning...so I confirmed that he was leaving 10,000 feet for 9,000 feet. He responded yes, and after about 90 seconds I asked the pilot if he was level at 9,000 feet and he then stated he lost all avionics....

What would you have done?

- Coordinate traffic separation for the DH8
- Call for a Supervisor
- Declare an emergency for the DH8 pilot
- ????

Situation #4: “The Passenger Agent Refused to Deal with the Problem” (Air Carrier Captain)

■ About 20 minutes prior to scheduled departure, the purser on my flight came into the cockpit to advise me that a handicapped passenger sitting in First Class had placed pillows or cushions in front of their seat in order to prop up their legs, which are disabled. The purser had asked

ASRS Alerts Issued in November 2008	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or aircraft equipment	8
Airport facility or procedure	4
Chart, Publication, or Nav Database	1
Company policy	1
Total	14

A Monthly Safety Bulletin from

The Office of the NASA
Aviation Safety Reporting
System,
P.O. Box 189,
Moffett Field, CA
94035-0189

<http://asrs.arc.nasa.gov/>

November 2008 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	2490
General Aviation Pilots	763
Controllers	39
Cabin/Mechanics/Military/Other	299
TOTAL	3591

the passenger if they would mind moving to the window seat so that the improvised foot rest wouldn't block the exit path in front of the seat. The passenger replied that their disability made it impossible for them to sit in the window seat. At this point, the purser brought the issue to me...I went out to the gate area to advise our [passenger agents] that we needed to find some solution to this, because we couldn't have exit space in front of this passenger's seat blocked, per FAR. The passenger agent...quickly refused to deal with the problem because 1) this passenger works in a government agency, and 2) because the passenger is at our company's highest level of Frequent Flyer program...

What would you have done?

- Refuse to move the aircraft until the passenger complies with FARs
- Stow the cushions during critical phases of flight
- Move the passenger to another accessible seat
- ???

The Rest of the Story - The Reporter's Actions

Situation #1: "I Was Quickly Running Out of Options" (GA Pilot)

- Confessed the dilemma to ATC

■During this entire time I contemplated turning around but I continued to assume better conditions were close ahead, and was also concerned that conditions behind me may have worsened. Finally I made a smart decision, to confess my dilemma to ATC, who suggested calling Flight Watch. I did contact Flight Watch who were very helpful, suggesting conditions should be better ahead, to the north, or failing that, at, or to the west of my destination. Shortly thereafter, I saw a large break in the cloud layer and descended rapidly through it to 6,500 feet. The remainder of the flight was completed uneventfully....

In retrospect, staying below the clouds would have been a much better option. I allowed incorrect assumptions about the extent of the overcast layer to influence my judgement, and failed to consider turning back when it was still my best option. On the positive side, I did eventually admit my mistake and obtain the assistance I needed, and Flight Watch and ATC were both helpful in resolving the situation without incident.

Situation #2: "We Simultaneously Received Two Calls" (Air Carrier Flight Crew)

- Delayed accepting the takeoff clearance until the passenger could be seated

■Before accepting the clearance onto the runway and while still holding, I communicated the problem to the Captain and asked the flight attendant to seat the

passenger immediately and inform us as soon as the cabin was secure. The Captain then told the Tower that we were now ready and we were cleared for takeoff on Runway 7L.

This scenario, while simple and with no violations, created a lot of confusion and chaos in the cabin, in the cockpit, and with ATC. I would continue to encourage the cabin crew to call us as soon as possible if they experience cabin security violations to allow us time to coordinate with ATC. In time-critical situations such as this scenario, explaining the nature of the problem to ATC and simply moving to the holding area to regroup may be the better choice in order to give everyone time to clear their heads in preparation for a safe, focused departure.

Situation #3: "The Pilot Lost All Avionics" (Air Traffic Controller)

- Declared an emergency for the DH8 pilot

■ I declared an emergency for the pilot and then called the West Departure controller as the aircraft was now in another controller's airspace and asked him to protect his airspace around the aircraft with the avionics failure as I did not know his altitude or heading. The pilot then called me to say he had an altimeter working and he was at 7,500 feet and asked me if [I wanted him] to go back up. I said no and to descend and maintain 6,000 feet. I then switched the aircraft to the Final controller and he landed without incident.

Situation #4: "The Passenger Agent Refused to Deal with the Problem" (Air Carrier Captain)

- Stowed the cushions during critical phases of flight

■ A Supervisor was called as was a Flight Ops Supervisor to deal with the problem. We ended up going back down to the airplane and had 5 people crammed in the cockpit of my B757 (2 pilots, the purser, and 2 supervisors) discussing what to do...I finally got across to the [passenger] Supervisor that it was illegal to have the area in front of this passenger's seat blocked for taxi, takeoff, and landing, and that the passenger's Frequent Flyer status and position in the government didn't change that. The Supervisor then went back and asked the passenger if they would mind if the cushions were stowed during those critical phases of flight, and the passenger said OK, and that was the end of it, but we took an 18-minute delay dealing with what should have been a simple problem....

I can't imagine what would have happened if the passenger had refused to allow the pillows/cushions to be stowed. I wasn't going to leave the gate like that. I need to point out that when the purser was originally trying to find a solution on her own with the passenger, the passenger said that...this was the first time anybody had said anything about this issue....My airline (and flight attendants) could have been violated every time an airplane took off and landed with this passenger's cushions in front of them, but the violation was ignored up to this point....