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Air passengers and crew at risk from contaminated air

Green Party leader Caroline Lucas MEP today supported a fresh call for a public inquiry into the exposure of airline passengers and the crews of UK transport aircraft.

In March 2008, the Global Cabin Air Quality Executive (GCAQE) called for a public inquiry to examine why the Labour government has allowed airline crews and passengers to be exposed to air contaminated with engine oils when flying. The Greens, the Conservatives and the LibDems supported the call, but the government refused to hold a public inquiry despite its acknowledgement that oil fumes are reported on one in every hundred flights.

After a full year, the government has not taken any action to prevent passengers and crews from being exposed to toxic chemicals in passenger aircraft or to ensure that passengers are informed when such exposures have occurred. So the GCAQE today renewed its call for an independent public inquiry to investigate the government's continued failure to protect the travelling public.

Head of Research for the Global Cabin Air Quality Executive, former airline pilot and PhD researcher, Captain Susan Michaelis, said today:

"The present air monitoring investigations being undertaken on behalf of the Department for Transport are seriously flawed. They fail to utilize data from international experts and appear designed to protect the airline industry rather than the health and safety of the travelling public and working crews.

"The German Broadcaster WDR has undertaken swab tests on 30 European passenger aircraft of which 28 positively identified the presence of the neurotoxic and immunotoxic organophosphate chemical, Tricresyl Phosphate (TCP). TCP is present in most commercial jet engine oils. This study replicated swab tests taken in the UK, Europe, Australia and the US which also proved passengers and crews are definitely being exposed to engine oil pyrolysis products in the aircraft cabins.

"The term 'Aerotoxic Syndrome' should be accepted by the UK Government rather than continuing to deny the problem exists. With a growing number of crews dying and becoming ill with brain tumours and other serious neurological illnesses, why

does the Government refuse to agree to an independent epidemiological survey of crews? The need for a proper epidemiological survey has again been supported by the recently published paper by M.Hale and J.Al-Seffar in the Journal of the Association of Neurophysiological Scientists.

Captain Michaelis continued:

“We applaud the decision taken this week by the ‘Aerotoxic Association’ and the Non Profit Group ‘Toxic Free Airlines’ to send every MP and Lord a copy of the investigative documentary film ‘Welcome Aboard Toxic Airlines.’ This will ensure everyone knows exactly what is going on.

"The airline industry funded Civil Aviation Authority has negligently failed to protect the travelling public. There is overwhelming evidence to show that exposure to contaminated cabin air is causing unacceptable risks to health and flight safety and the precautionary principle should be applied. Solutions to resolve this problem such as installing filtration technologies or developing non toxic oils exist and they know it.

"Airlines continue to preside over a global scandal. Not only are they supplying the travelling public with unfiltered engine air to breathe, known for decades to sometimes become contaminated with toxic chemicals but they don't tell the public there is a risk of exposure when flying or when they have been exposed. This has to be a breach of their human rights.

"No commercial airliner has any form of detection system fitted to warn when the air is contaminated. This is a serious risk to flight safety. The travelling public deserve to be better protected."

As well as the Greens, the campaign is also supported by Teresa Villiers MP and Norman Baker MP, the Conservative and LibDem shadow transport secretaries.

Notes:

1. GCAQE comprises some 20 organisations in 3 continents and represents around 500,000 airline pilots, crew and engineers. In the UK, both the Independent Pilots Association (IPA) and Unite the Union are members of the GCAQE.
2. Aerotoxic Association was formed in 2007 by former airline training captain John Hoyte. (www.aerotoxic.org) Tel: 01295-770808 (+4412957708080).
3. Journal Of The Association Of Neurophysiological Scientists (2008) 2 - Preliminary Report On Aerotoxic Syndrome(As)And The Need For Diagnostic Neurophysiological Tests - The Current Debate.
4. GCAQE researcher, former pilot and PhD student, Susan Michaelis recently published the 844 page ‘Aviation Contaminated Air Reference Manual’ documenting the history of the hazards associated with synthetic jet engine oils and hydraulic fluids leaking into aircraft cabin air supplies. Copies are available from selected public libraries or from www.susanmichaelis.com. The work was said to be ‘ground-breaking and seminal work’ by the Royal Australian Air Force.

5. All commercial jet aircraft supply breathing air for passengers and crews taken directly from the engines and supplied unfiltered to the passenger cabin. This air, known as 'bleed air' is known to become contaminated with hazardous chemicals present in synthetic jet engine oils and hydraulic fluids. These chemicals include the organophosphates 'tricresyl phosphate' and 'tributyl phosphate'.

6. The history of the hazards associated with synthetic jet engine oils and hydraulic fluids leaking into aircraft cabin air supplies have been a concern since the 1950's. Appropriate research, called for in 1977 following the documented incapacitation of a crew member, has never been undertaken.

7. An Early Day Motion was previously issued in relation to these matters: EDM 1017 - Contaminated Air On Commercial Aircraft - 22.02.2008.

www.gcaqe.org

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