

# Commercial Pilot Checklist - Unruly Passengers

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[You hear about unruly passengers in the news all the time now; planes being diverted, forced landings, fighter jets deployed, etc. But the good news is that the number of "unruly passengers" as defined by the TSA, FAA and FBI has gone down since 2004. The FBI reports an average of 80 incidents aboard aircraft each year. That is significantly lower than in 2004 when there were 304 incidents reported by the FAA.](#)

[As a flight training student](#), you need to learn all about commercial piloting - that means not just handling an aircraft, but also handling people. These are the grey areas of commercial piloting that some flight schools will teach a flight training student about – and other [flight schools](#) won't.

## Federal Laws

There have been laws prohibiting interference with flight crews and attendants on aircraft for decades. But ever since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, federal authorities and airlines have clamped down and imposed stiffer fines and punishments for unruly passengers.

"Now people are more hyper-vigilant on what occurs on aircrafts," said Ron Koziol, assistant section chief for the FBI's violent crimes unit. "The U.S. government is more aware of what can occur on an aircraft, and officials don't want those issues causing the plane to be in an unsafe environment."

Interfering with the duties of a crew member violates federal law. Federal Aviation Regulations 91.11, 121.580 and 135.120 state that "no person may assault, threaten, intimidate, or interfere with a crew member in the performance of the crew member's duties aboard an aircraft being operated."

As part of the FAA's Reauthorization Bill (April 16, 2000) FAA can propose up to \$25,000 per violation for unruly passenger cases. Previously, the maximum civil penalty per violation was \$1,100. One incident can result in multiple violations.

## Reasons for Unruly Behavior

Alcoholic beverages are by far the most common problem associated with unruly behavior. Over half of all incidents are directly attributed to intoxicated passengers. Passengers "under the influence" indulged in a variety of bizarre and alarming behaviors - refusing to comply with crew requests, using profane and abusive language, and assaulting crewmembers and other passengers. In many cases, the cabin crew draws on their collective wisdom and training to prevent a potentially

hazardous situation.

There are other kinds of behavior that are not tolerated on an aircraft:

- Offensive and disorderly conduct such as physical assault, verbal abuse or sexual harassment
- Interfering with the crew or threatening the safety of the aircraft or people on board
- Smoking in any part of the aircraft - particularly in the bathrooms
- Disobeying instructions by the flight or cabin crew

Airlines are starting to ban passengers who have been identified as being disruptive and unruly. There is talk of displaying signs in airports that warn passengers of a zero tolerance policy for this kind of behavior. Many airlines have rules and conditions of boarding on the back of their boarding pass.

Cabin crews have the authority to restrain drunk or violent passengers. Passengers considered unruly may be refused boarding, or the flight may be diverted to have the occupants in question removed.

The one rule that every passenger should remember is - "Fly by the rules or take the bus."