



## Research Request:

### **Safe Handling of Passengers with Disabilities**

## Research Response:

### [FAA AC 120-32](#)

SEATING HANDICAPPED PASSENGERS. FAA's Civil Aeromedical Institute has conducted research to determine where handicapped passengers should be seated in an aircraft operated under Parts 121 and 135 so that, in the event of an emergency evacuation, they can leave the aircraft, either unassisted or assisted, by the safest and most expedient route while not slowing the evacuation.

- a. Those nonambulatory handicapped passengers should be seated in aisle seats where they would be near the end of lines of passengers being evacuated through floor-level, nonoverwing exits. Tests revealed that due to the narrow aisle width, an accompanying attendant trying to lift the handicapped person would temporarily block the aisle and hinder other passengers attempting to evacuate. Once the mainstream of evacuating passengers has passed, the attendant and the handicapped passenger can normally catch up to the flow since there is a bunching at the exit. Two nonambulatory passengers with attendants should not be seated directly across the aisle from each other because their attendants would interfere with each other while attempting to remove the nonambulatory passengers from their seats.
- b. To determine the amount of assistance nonambulatory passengers will require to evacuate the aircraft, an agent should first ask the passengers what their capabilities are. If there is some question as to whether an individual is ambulatory or nonambulatory, the agent may ask him to perform a simple test such as transferring from a wheelchair, unaided, to another seat. Additionally, the passenger may furnish evidence of his capability, such as a driver's license or a statement signed by a qualified professional person (e. g. ) a physician or physical therapist).
- c. Ambulatory handicapped passengers should be seated in areas in which evacuation would normally occur through a floor-level, nonoverwing exit.

## DOT Rule 14 CFR 382

*Carrier means a U.S. citizen (“U.S. carrier”) or foreign citizen (“foreign carrier”) that undertakes, directly or indirectly, or by a lease or any other arrangement, to engage in air transportation.*

**Seating Accommodations:** As a carrier, you must provide the following seating accommodations to the following passengers on request, if the passenger self-identifies to you as having a disability specified in this section and the type of seating accommodation in question exists on the particular aircraft. Once the passenger self-identifies to you, you must ensure that the information is recorded and properly transmitted to personnel responsible for providing the accommodation.

- (a) For a passenger who uses an aisle chair to access the aircraft and who cannot readily transfer over a fixed aisle armrest, you must provide a seat in a row with a movable aisle armrest. You must ensure that your personnel are trained in the location and proper use of movable aisle armrests, including appropriate transfer techniques. You must ensure that aisle seats with movable armrests are clearly identifiable.
- (b) You must provide an adjoining seat for a person assisting a passenger with a disability in the following circumstances:
  - (1) When a passenger with a disability is traveling with a personal care attendant who will be performing a function for the individual during the flight that airline personnel are not required to perform (e.g., assistance with eating);
  - (2) When a passenger with a vision impairment is traveling with a reader/assistant who will be performing functions for the individual during the flight;
  - (3) When a passenger with a hearing impairment is traveling with an interpreter who will be performing functions for the individual during the flight; or
  - (4) When you require a passenger to travel with a safety assistant (see §382.29).
- (c) For a passenger with a disability traveling with a service animal, you must provide, as the passenger requests, either a bulkhead seat or a seat other than a bulkhead seat.
- (d) For a passenger with a fused or immobilized leg, you must provide a bulkhead seat or other seat that provides greater legroom than other seats, on the side of an aisle that better accommodates the individual's disability.

**Boarding & Deplaning:** As a carrier, you must promptly provide or ensure the provision of assistance requested by or on behalf of passengers with a disability, or offered by carrier or airport operator personnel and accepted by passengers with a disability, in

enplaning and deplaning. This assistance must include, as needed, the services of personnel and the use of ground wheelchairs, accessible motorized carts, boarding wheelchairs, and/or on-board wheelchairs where provided in accordance with this part, and ramps or mechanical lifts.

Boarding and exiting most medium and large-size jet aircraft is almost always by way of level boarding ramps or mobile lounges, which must be accessible. If ramps or mobile lounges are not used, then on most flights using aircraft with 19 or more seats a lifting device (other than a device used for freight) must be provided to assist persons with limited mobility safely on and off the aircraft. On flights on smaller aircraft, passengers with mobility impairments are generally carried up and down the aircraft's boarding stairs using a "boarding chair."

When level-entry boarding and deplaning assistance is not required to be provided under this subpart, you must, as a carrier, provide or ensure the provision of boarding and deplaning assistance by any available means to which the passenger consents. However, you must never use hand-carrying (i.e., directly picking up the passenger's body in the arms of one or more carrier personnel to effect a level change the passenger needs to enter or leave the aircraft), even if the passenger consents, unless this is the only way of evacuating the individual in the event of an emergency.

**Services on Aircraft:** As a carrier, you must provide services within the aircraft cabin as requested by or on behalf of passengers with a disability, or when offered by carrier personnel and accepted by passengers with a disability, as follows:

- (a) Assistance in moving to and from seats, as part of the enplaning and deplaning processes;
- (b) Assistance in preparation for eating, such as opening packages and identifying food;
- (c) If there is an on-board wheelchair on the aircraft, assistance with the use of the on-board wheelchair to enable the person to move to and from a lavatory;
- (d) Assistance to a semi-ambulatory person in moving to and from the lavatory, not involving lifting or carrying the person; or
- (e) Assistance in stowing and retrieving carry-on items, including mobility aids and other assistive devices stowed in the cabin (see also 382.91(d)). To receive such assistance, the passenger must self-identify as being an individual with a disability needing the assistance.
- (f) Effective communication with passengers who have vision impairments or who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, so that these passengers have prompt access to information

the carrier provides to other passengers (e.g. weather, on-board services, flight delays, connecting gates at the next airport).

### [FAA AC 121-24C Appendix 3](#)

Passengers Needing Assistance. The pilot in command or a crewmember must individually brief a passenger who may need assistance in moving expeditiously to an exit if an emergency occurs as to the procedures to be followed if an evacuation occurs. If the person is accompanied by an attendant, the attendant must also be briefed. The briefing must include information about the most appropriate route to an exit and the most appropriate time to start moving toward that exit. There should also be an inquiry about the most appropriate manner of assisting the person to prevent pain and further injury. (See §135.117(b).)