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Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety ✦ Centre canadien d'hygiène et de sécurité au travail

Occupations and Workplaces

Flight Crew and Cabin Crew

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What is a flight crew and cabin crew?

Flight crews are in charge of flying and ensuring the safe navigation of the airplane. A flight crew consists of pilots who are responsible for flying and navigating the aircraft. They include the captain (or pilot-in-command) and the first officer (or co-pilot).

The cabin crew consists of flight attendants who are responsible for ensuring the safety, comfort, and well-being of passengers during the flight. Cabin crew members assist passengers with boarding, help them stow their luggage, provide safety demonstrations, serve meals and beverages, and address any passenger needs or inquiries. They also play a critical role in emergency evacuations and first aid on board the aircraft.

Both groups collaborate to ensure a safe flying experience for passengers and play important roles in the overall operation of an airline.

What does a typical workday look like for a flight and cabin crew?

A typical workday for flight and cabin crew members can vary depending on the airline, the type of flight (domestic or international), and the specific role (pilot or cabin crew). The workday includes pre-flight, boarding and in-flight, and post-flight responsibilities.

Pre-flight

Responsibilities for the flight crew include:

- Arriving at the airport and going through security.

- Reviewing the flight plan, weather conditions, and operational details.

- Conducting a thorough inspection of the aircraft, checking systems, instruments, and safety equipment.

- Meeting with cabin crew to discuss any special considerations for the flight.

Responsibilities for the cabin crew include:

- Arriving at the airport and going through security.

- Attending a pre-flight briefing and receiving information about the flight, any special passenger needs, safety procedures, and service expectations.

- Verifying assigned equipment and ensuring everything is in working order.

- Reviewing the passenger manifest to be aware of any special requests or passenger information.

Boarding and In-flight

Responsibilities for the flight crew include:

- Completing pre-flight checklists, communicating with air traffic control, and performing takeoff and landing procedures.

- Monitoring the aircraft's systems, instruments, and navigation.

- Making in-flight announcements to update passengers on weather conditions and other relevant information.

- Working closely with air traffic control to ensure safe navigation and adherence to the flight plan.

Responsibilities for the cabin crew include:

- Welcoming passengers, assisting with seating, stowing carry-on luggage, and ensuring passenger comfort and safety.

- Conducting safety demonstrations and providing instructions in the event of an emergency.

- Attending to passenger needs, providing food and beverage services, and providing assistance where required.

- Conducting periodic cabin checks.

- Ensuring passengers are seated with their seatbelts fastened in the event of turbulence or other disruptions.

Post-flight

Responsibilities for the flight crew include:

- Taxiing the airplane to its designated gate.

- Completing post-flight checklists, shutting down the aircraft systems, and securing the cockpit.

- Participating in a debriefing to discuss any issues or concerns from the flight.

Responsibilities for the cabin crew include:

- Assisting passengers to disembark the plane and ensuring the cabin is tidy.

- Grooming the cabin by removing garbage, lowering armrests, and crossing seatbelts in preparation for the next flight.

- Completing paperwork, including food and beverage counts, passenger feedback, and any incidents.

- Participating in a debriefing to discuss any issues or concerns from the flight.

What are some health and safety issues for flight and cabin crews?

Flight and cabin crews face several health and safety hazards due to the unique nature of their work environment and the demands of their roles. These hazards can vary in severity, and airlines will have policies and training in place to address them.

Some common health and safety hazards include:

- Noise.

- Whole-body vibration.

- Turbulence.

- Exposure to contagious or infectious diseases.

- Shift work and extended work days.

- Fatigue and jet lag due to frequent time zone changes and irregular work hours.

- Dehydration and dry skin.

- Cosmic radiation exposure, especially for long flights at higher altitudes.

- Manual material handling from lifting luggage, pushing service carts, and assisting passengers.

- Bending and awkward body positioning leaning over seats and rows.

- Cuts or finger injuries from sharp objects when collecting garbage or unknown materials from seat pockets.

- Psychological stress dealing with difficult passengers and managing emergencies.

- Workplace violence and harassment when dealing with hostile passengers.

- Hazardous products and materials, including Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS).

- Work at heights when opening plane doors for the bridge or stairway.

- Fire and smoke.

- Prolonged standing.

Additionally, international aviation organizations and authorities provide guidelines and recommendations to ensure the well-being of flight and cabin crews. Regular medical examinations and ongoing training are part of the measures designed to protect their health and safety.

What are some preventive measures for flight and cabin crews?

Preventive measures help ensure the health and safety of flight and cabin crews. There are numerous checklists and procedures to protect the safety of passengers as well as the health and safety of flight and cabin crews. Additional preventive measures can also be practices reducing exposure to hazards.

To prevent or reduce exposure to hazards:

- Wash your hands frequently.

- Know the routine practices to prevent contracting blood-borne pathogens.

- Understand other additional measures for reducing exposure to infectious diseases, such as COVID-19.

- Learn safe lifting techniques, such as manual material handling.

- Be aware of your surroundings to avoid trips and falls.

- Always wear your seatbelt in times of turbulence or when directed by the flight crew.

- Learn about stress and post-traumatic stress and consider a debriefing session or counselling after a critical or traumatic event.

- Inform your employer early in pregnancy or try to bid on flights that do not interrupt normal sleeping times and are shorter flights to reduce radiation exposure.

- Exercise regularly to keep fit and reduce the risk of injury.

- Participate in regular medical examinations for physical and mental health.

- Keep vaccinations up to date, especially for common illnesses such as influenza or specific vaccinations for travel to certain regions.

- Do not exceed the maximum working hours. Recognize the signs of fatigue.

- Explore strategies to manage jet lag.

- Participate in radiation monitoring if requested.

- Wear hearing protection as required.

- Ensure clear communication with the flight crew.

- Wear gloves when handling garbage.

- Use caution when putting hands in seat pockets or other locations where you cannot see potential hazards.

- Know how to identify and handle hazardous materials brought on board.

- Receive fire suppression training.

- Report any hazards and ensure open communication.

- Have first aid training.

- Regularly review evacuation and emergency procedures.

- Make sure the stairs or bridge are installed before opening cabin doors.

- Practice de-escalation techniques in the event of violence or harassment.

- Seek mental health help or services after an incident or for ongoing care.

How do flight and cabin crews collaborate to prevent incidents?

Effective communication between the flight and cabin crew ensures the safe operation of the aircraft and the well-being of passengers. In aviation, this interaction and collaboration between the flight and cabin crew is called crew resource management (CRM).

Crew resource management is a set of training and communication strategies used in aviation to enhance teamwork and decision-making among flight and cabin crews. Crew resource management was developed in response to a series of aircraft incidents in the 1970s and 1980s that were attributed, at least in part, to human error, often stemming from poor communication and teamwork in the cockpit and cabin.

The primary goal of crew resource management is to improve the safety and efficiency of flight operations by addressing various aspects of crew performance, such as communication, leadership, situational awareness, problem-solving, and decision-making. Crew resource management training focuses on developing interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and effective coordination among crew members. It emphasizes the importance of clear, concise, and timely communication between cabin crew and pilots. It promotes a culture of collaboration and mutual respect in the cockpit and cabin. This management system includes providing essential information and actively listening to each other's inputs and concerns. Crews must feel empowered to report hazards or potential concerns early so they can be addressed promptly.

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