

FAA Urges Laptop Ban

The Federal Aviation Administration put out a statement this past Friday, October 20, 2017, urging aviation authorities around the world to ban large electronic devices like laptops from being transported in checked bags.

The issue of overheating rechargeable lithium-ion batteries has long been an area of concern which was escalated recently with the so-called 'laptop ban' on flights from certain Middle Eastern airports. But now this goes much further... The FAA wants a complete worldwide ban on laptops in the cargo hold after conducting its own tests.

In a paper published by the U.N. agency International Civil Aviation Organization, the FAA said a laptop's lithium-ion battery can explode when placed near an aerosol spray can, which could disable a plane's fire suppression system. That could lead to 'the loss of the aircraft,' it said.

Among a series of 10 tests, the FAA placed a heater next to the laptop battery in order to simulate 'thermal runaway.'

- In one test an aerosol can of dry shampoo was strapped to the battery and exploded within 40 seconds. FAA officials said due to the speed of the fire's progression, a cargo hold's fire suppression system would likely be unable to extinguish a fire before an explosion.
- Other tests were carried out with batteries placed next to other products which are permitted in checked bags such as nail polish remover, hand sanitizer, and rubbing alcohol. These also resulted in larger fires.

In the last decade, three cargo jets have been destroyed and four pilots were killed by fires which were either ignited by or further impacted by shipments of lithium batteries.

Although the statement and research are only in their infancy, the reality of concerns around lithium batteries in laptops is that they are a threat to safety. There is no immediate action being taken other than the review of the findings. TSA is increasing their testing of laptops through security checkpoints for carry on, while finding opportunities to identify efficiencies within the process.