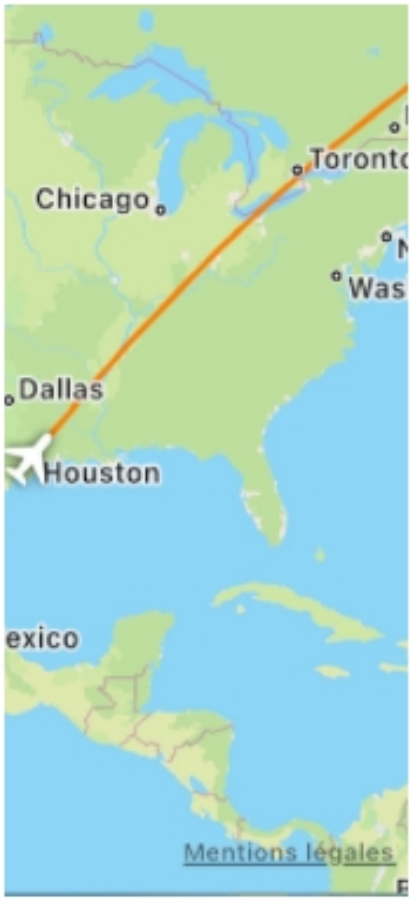
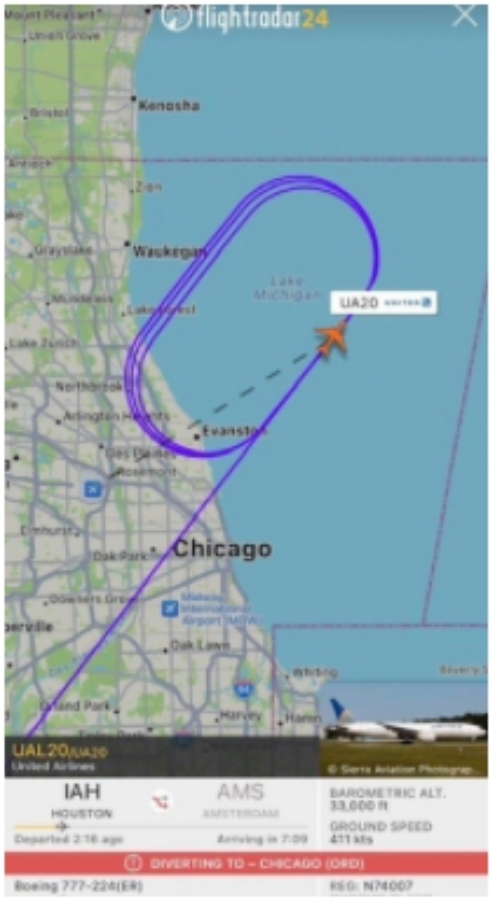
SAFESKY CASE STUDY - UNRULY PASSENGER UNITED AIRLINES JULY 9 2023

News / Airlines





When we heard the story of this flight, our first instinct was to ask the experts for their opinion. SAFEsky Managing Director Frederick Reitz gave us all you need to know on this case study. On July 9, 2023, United Airlines flight 20, a Boeing 777, was in the air for 2 hours, en route from Houston, Texas, to Amsterdam, when a passenger in business class became angry when his first meal choice was unavailable. The passenger began cursing at the flight attendants and refused to comply with their requests to return his seat. Like most airlines, United Airlines takes the safety and security of their crewmembers and passengers seriously, and the flight crew decided to divert the flight to Chicago, Illinois, to remove the passenger.

Sounds easy. Just land and drop off an unruly passenger and depart again. In an emergency, the decision to divert an aircraft is serious and can be costly to the airline. The 777 can carry a load of up to 47,890 gallons (321327 pounds) of fuel. Estimating that the aircraft was fueled to 321327 pounds, only 34000 pounds of fuel would have been used at the time of the diversion decision, so Flight 20 had to dump fuel to reduce the aircraft's weight before it could safely land in Chicago. Dumping fuel occurs at a minimum altitude between 3000 and 5000 feet. It is accomplished by the

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pilot pressing a button that disperses the fuel over a wide area, evaporating it into a fine mist.

Upon landing, Law Enforcement officials met the aircraft, and the man was escorted off the aircraft while he continued to express his verbal outrage. The aircraft was refueled and departed, arriving in Amsterdam three hours late.

Unruly passengers cost the airlines thousands of dollars, inconvenienced the other passengers, and resulted in schedule disruptions. In the case of United Flight 20, 1 passenger was upset over his meal, which inconvenienced 275 other passengers who had vacation or work plans, inconvenienced the 276 passengers who were in Amsterdam waiting to return to the US, delayed the crew rests for the pilots and flight attendants, which may have resulted in the requirement to schedule new crews to complete the flight. The operating cost of a 777 is around $11,000; with thousands of pounds of fuel dumped, employment compensation to crew for three additional hours, the inconvenienced passengers compensation, and the schedule delay, the diversion would cost United approximately $75,000.00.

What can be done to curb Unruly Passengers? Airlines are beginning to fight back. During the covid pandemic, Delta Airlines put over 1,900 passengers on their internal no-fly list for failing to comply with the Federal Government mask mandate. The Federal Aviation Administration has referred over 250 Unruly passenger cases to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for criminal prosecution and many more for civil penalties.

In 2017, a US Federal Judge ordered a New Jersey man to pay $100,000 to Hawaiian Airlines for his unruly behavior on a Honolulu to New York flight. The passenger assaulted his family members and a flight attendant, resulting in the plane returning to Honolulu. The man was arrested and pled guilty.

In October 2023, aviation staff members from around the globe, including pilots, and flight attendants security experts, will meet in Prague at the Dispax 2023 Unruly Passenger Management and Restraint Seminar hosted by Green Light Ltd, an aviation security consulting

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