



FAA Ordered to Address Safety Concerns Over Shrinking Airline Seats and Growing Passengers

In July 2017, a U.S. Appeals Court judge ordered the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to review the size of airline seats based on safety concerns.

In what she termed “the incredible shrinking airline seat,” Judge Patricia Ann Millett ordered the FAA to take the action, saying the agency had been remiss in its job of setting minimum standards for the size of economy class seats, along with the distance between rows.

In the order, Millett directed the FAA to “adequately address” a petition filed by the passenger advocacy group Flyers Rights. The petition called for the agency to study whether tighter spaces on domestic flights were a safety hazard.

Flyers Rights had argued that airlines seats were “designed for people no taller than 5’10”, and in reasonably good shape.” They went on to say that “many Americans do not fit into this category.”

According to the petition, the distance between seats between rows had decreased from an average of 35

inches to 31 in recent years, and the average seat width had decreased by about 1.5 inches in the past decade.

The average American, the petition went on to point out, has grown even as seats shrank. The average adult male now weighs 191, a gain of 25 pounds since the 1960s, while average women have gained 24 pounds to 164 in that same time.

The ruling of the court found that Flyers Rights had identified legitimate safety concerns brought about by the combination of larger passengers and shrinking seats, potentially making it more difficult for passengers to exit the plane in case of emergency.

The FAA’s only comment was that it “does consider seat pitch in testing and assessing the safe evacuation of commercial, passenger aircraft. We are studying the ruling carefully and any potential actions we may take to address the Court’s findings.”

There was no deadline set for the FAA to meet Millett’s order.

Source: Condé Nast and The New York Times