



January 8, 2002

Mr. John Creighton
CEO
United Airlines
PO Box 66100
Chicago, IL 60666

Dear Mr. Creighton:

On 2 November 2001, I sent you an eleven-page letter that described, in detail, our union's deep-rooted concerns about the application of pesticide sprays in the passenger cabin and cockpit of United Airlines aircraft. To refresh your memory, Congressional support on this issue has been strong, and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Transportation, the former US Assistant Surgeon General, and the California Department of Health Services Occupational Health Branch have all spoken out against this practice.

Despite this, United has not: (1) made any meaningful effort to explore alternatives to spraying; (2) rerouted selected aircraft to reduce the spraying frequency, as requested (despite claims in September 2000 bulletin); or (3) improved the ventilation in the crew rest areas, as requested. In short, little has changed and we continue to receive reports of ill health from flight attendants, pilots, and passengers.

In my November letter, I particularly objected to the false and misleading verbiage of United's in-flight spraying announcement. Namely, the requirement that, within minutes of the spraying, flight attendants inform the passengers that a "non-toxic spray" will be sprayed over their heads. ***Not only did you not respond to my letter, but United has since distributed new announcement booklets, effective 1 January 2002, with exactly the same message:***

"Ladies and gentlemen, agriculture and health requirements recommended by the World Health Organization require a non-toxic spray in _____ (city) to avoid introduction of harmful insects. Please remain seated while the cabin is being sprayed."

I am left to conclude that United Airlines has no interest in providing their passengers with accurate information, either prior to their ticket purchase or after boarding. This, despite our concerted and documented efforts for more than 17 months to bring this issue that affects the health of the occupants, as well as aviation safety, to United's attention.

During that time, we have also made every effort to inform our members of the chemical contents of the sprays and the need to document the conditions. Although United has forbidden their on-duty flight attendants from "discussing disinsection concerns in the earshot of passengers", it would be irresponsible of us not to also pass information on to the flying public.

You may be interested to know that the very same insecticide spray that is sprayed on United passengers and crew is also registered under the name "Black Flag Roach Killer" (EPA Reg. 901-82). In a letter dated 24 August 1994, the EPA insisted that the product label read (in bold font) "**Not to be used in aircraft with passengers and crew aboard.**" The label on another such can reads that the aerosol is "hazardous if swallowed or absorbed through the skin", and warns the user to "avoid breathing vapors", "avoid contact with skin, eyes, exposed food, crockery, and cutlery", and "do not use in food preparation or processing areas." Nonetheless, for in-flight aircraft application, users are told to "spray all surfaces and ensure that ventilation openings are closed."

Mr. Creighton, as I said in my last letter, United has a choice. You have the opportunity to make history by taking steps to significantly improve the morale, health, and safety of these flight attendants and pilots who love their jobs and want to be able to work without wrecking their health or compromising the safety of flight. Or you have the opportunity to continue United's legacy of doing nothing to address these conditions. Once again, I urge you, in your new position as CEO, to take an aggressive and active stand against this antiquated practice to stop the routine exposure of your crewmembers and passengers to these toxic sprays and then advertise the result - improved safety and health for all who chose to fly United. In the meantime, if the practice of in-flight spraying is sometimes required under the current (but sorely outdated) rule, then the requisite announcement must be changed to reflect the current view of experts at the EPA and CDC. I can be reached at 202-712-9736.

Sincerely,



Patricia Friend
President
Association of Flight Attendants, AFL-CIO