Aircraft Air Quality: The Basics

Crew and passengers regularly report problems with aircraft air quality. Ever noticed that the air in the cabin gets stuffy, and that sometimes the air conditioning is turned off completely on the ground? Ever found the aircraft far too hot or too cold and you are just left to deal with it? Ever noticed that some aircraft have those air nozzles (“gaspers”) over each seat and some don’t? (And that some of them work and some don’t?) Ever found that sometimes you can’t get a deep enough breath, like there isn’t enough oxygen? That your seat smells like pesticides? That the cabin regularly smells like fuel, deicing fluid, or diesel exhaust before takeoff? That the galley is freezing? Ever smelled heated hydraulic fluid or oil that comes from the air supply vents overhead, or noticed that you seem to regularly get a cold or some other bug after flying? These are documented and routine complaints with aircraft air quality, and are described in more detail on this site. (Visit separate pages for SARS and pesticide exposure.) When you consider that air quality on aircraft is effectively unregulated - unlike almost all other indoor environments - and that there is no government reporting system to systematically collect the data, it’s no big surprise. The airlines and manufacturers can get away with cutting these corners to save money, leaving crew and passengers with symptoms that range from headaches and nausea to fainting and nerve damage. Get informed and submit reports to AFA. Crew and passengers need to unite and speak out to the airlines and the FAA with a united voice.