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WestJet has 'little tolerance' for intoxicated flyers

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The Globe and Mail

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The two allegedly drunk women on Wednesday's Sunwing flight to Cuba are among hundreds of Canadians who have caused trouble in the skies in the past decade.

There have been at least 263 alcohol-, cigarette- or marijuana-related incidents on Canadian flights, or flights passing through Canada, since 2005, according to an analysis of Transport Canada aviation data.

And if you've ever been lucky enough to witness one of them, odds are you were flying WestJet. A total of 205, or 78 per cent of all reports, were for incidents on WestJet planes.

WestJet's high numbers aren't necessarily an indication of more troublemakers aboard, company media relations adviser Brie Ogle said in an e-mail. Rather, it's "a direct reflection of how often and how consistently we report alcohol and cigarette-related incidents."

"We have little tolerance for those who would jeopardize the safety on board our aircraft, and the only way we can ensure those committing infractions are dealt with appropriately is to track them consistently," Ms. Ogle said.

Those infractions include a time in 2008 when, on a WestJet flight from Montreal to Winnipeg, a passenger was discovered smoking in the lavatory. Shortly after, he was "observed rolling cigarettes in his seat and had taken his shirt off. He would only respond to French," the report said.

It was later confirmed he was smoking both cigarettes and marijuana on board the flight. The information was collected based on word searches, including "alcohol," "intoxicated," and "cigarette," in CADORS, Transport Canada's public aviation database.

Air Canada, the country's biggest carrier, sat a distant second with 13 reports. "We are fully compliant with all reporting requirements," said company spokesperson Peter Fitzpatrick in an e-mail.

Taken as a whole, the number of incidents reflect only a fraction of the passengers onboard planes. WestJet's 166 reports from January 2010 through June 2014 account for 0.00021 per cent of all its passengers over the time period.

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ELIZABETH RENZETTI

Have we lost all sense of how to behave when we fly? Add to ...

[ELIZABETH RENZETTI](#)

The Globe and Mail

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"If a chair is designed to recline, and you recline at appropriate times (as in not mid-food service), then you should be allowed to do so," one of my colleagues said, completely irrationally.

I refuted this with impeccable logic: "Some chairs are designed to electrocute people. Doesn't make it right." Such are the giddy rhetorical heights we reach at Canada's national newspaper when matters of world import are being discussed.

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In this case, the question was: Does an airline passenger have a right to recline his or her seat at the expense of the person sitting behind? This discussion exploded this week after two passengers disrupted a flight from Newark to Denver. One tried to recline her seat, but was prevented by the man behind deploying a nefarious anti-reclining gadget called "The Knee Defender." Tempers exploded. Water was thrown. Shame may have been felt, or more likely not. Each of the passengers was 48 years old, which is 43 years past the official deadline for knowing how to behave in public.

There is no right answer to the reclining debate, despite the heated conviction of each side. When space is finite and two parties are equally convinced that they are entitled to a larger share of it, tensions rise. Just ask Vladimir Putin. A more challenging question is: Have we lost all sense of how to behave when we fly?

Heather Poole, flight attendant and author of *Cruising Attitude: Tales of Crashpads, Crew Drama and Crazy Passengers at 35,000 Feet*, wrote about the state of hostilities in the wake of the Seat Wars of '14: "While most passengers dread turbulence, what leaves a lot of flight attendants dreading a long flight are on-board confrontations, which seem to be happening more often these days." Once, she witnessed a woman threaten to deck a teenaged girl if the girl dared to put her seat back.

A sense of entitlement is in the air, especially with the exasperated business travellers she calls "road warriors": "Ask a frequent flier to check a bag and they might lose it in front of everyone," Ms. Poole wrote in another piece. "Time is money. A road warrior doesn't do baggage claim."

Instances of "unruly passengers" are soaring, according to the International Air Transport Association, which recorded 6,000 such incidences of drunkenness, rowdiness, belligerence and bathroom intimacies in 2011, and more than 8,000 in 2013. Fewer than 500 were reported in 2007, when the IATA started keeping track (although we are flying more, and probably keeping better track).

"Unruly passenger" covers everything from the inept terrorist who fails to ignite his own underpants to the Bridezilla who, somewhere between Manchester and Barcelona, decides she no longer enjoys the company of one of her hen-party guests and begins to wallop her. (At least the assailant wore a wedding veil for handy identification.)

It covers the two women who appeared in an Ontario courtroom this week on charges they drunkenly disrupted a flight to Cuba. (The plane enjoyed a “ride of shame” escort by two fighter jets back to Toronto.) I’d like to think “unruly passenger” is too slight a punishment for the man who, despite repeated warnings, opened a pack of peanuts mid-flight and caused a four-year-old to go into anaphylactic shock.

These unruly passengers are merely the outliers (outflyers?), their behaviour overshadowing the myriad crabby ways we behave on airplanes, from armrest-hogging and overhead-bin-stuffing to aisle-charging the second the magical “ping” sounds at the end of a flight.

I’m not sure that in the golden age of air travel, when stewardesses plied the aisles with trays of Steak Diane, it was common to see misbehaving executives trussed in duct tape, entire families involved in multigenerational brawls on the way to Barbados or famous French actors peeing into bottles in full view of other passengers. The glitter has long since dulled. Flying is work, not pleasure; war, not peace. With the frequency of flying comes the contempt of familiarity.

This is perhaps not a popular way of framing the debate. We are supposed to blame the airlines rather than our lack of self-control for rotten flying experiences, pointing to their ever-scrimping seat allotments, which treat passengers like factory-farmed hens. Economy passengers, anyway: Business flyers are up front playing polo, or so I’ve read in that famous collection of fairy tales, Condé Nast Traveler.

It’s true that airlines are putting on the squeeze, in pursuit of profit and cheaper fares. They slyly introduce user fees and “slimline seating” (think “wad of Kleenex covered in EZ-Wipe fabric”) to shove in one extra row. Airlines “view seats as money-makers, not just pieces of furniture,” the Associated Press reported last fall. “Add a few inches of legroom and airlines can charge more for tickets. Take away a few inches and they can fit more seats on the plane.”

If the airlines feel entitled to try to drain every last penny from passengers, passengers feel equally entitled – to carry ever more baggage onto ever-cheaper flights, and to erupt on Twitter and Facebook at each minor inconvenience. Or, sometimes to just erupt, over a seatback, fighting for their inch of the unfriendly skies.

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Man on Panama flight arrested after alleged threats made on airliner

SAHAR FATIMA

The Globe and Mail

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Two U.S. fighter jets escorted a Panama-bound Sunwing Airlines flight back to Toronto after a man allegedly made threats, forcing the plane to turn around Friday morning.

The two F-16s shadowed the Sunwing plane all the way to Toronto, said Captain Jennifer Stadnyk, of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). She said it was standard protocol for military planes to escort planes if there is uncertainty aboard the flight.

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INFOGRAPHIC

Flight 772 departed Pearson, turned around over West Virginia

"It was a precautionary measure," Captain Stadnyk said. "Once the aircraft was safely on the ground in Toronto, the fighters departed and returned to their home base in Ohio."

Ali Shahi, a 25-year-old Canadian citizen, was arrested and faces several charges including uttering threats, endangering the safety of an aircraft, and mischief charges, Peel Regional Police Constable Lilly Fitzpatrick said. He is expected in court for a bail hearing in Brampton Saturday.

Flight 772 departed Pearson at 7 a.m. but turned around about 45 minutes later over West Virginia when "an agitated customer made a direct threat against the aircraft," Janine Chapman, spokesperson for Sunwing, said in an e-mailed statement.

She said she didn't know what the man's direct quotes were but could confirm that he tore up a duty free magazine.

Peel police's tactical unit entered the plane upon landing at about 9 a.m. and arrested Mr. Shahi without incident, Constable Fitzpatrick said.

Cellphone video shot by a passenger and acquired by CTV showed SWAT team officers storming the plane with their guns drawn, yelling, "Heads down, hands up."

"At this point I don't have any details of what the nature of threat was but it caused the pilot enough concern that he thought it in the best interest for the safety of everyone on board that the plane return to Toronto," Constable Fitzpatrick said.

All 181 passengers, two infants and six crew members were safe, said, spokesperson for Sunwing, and there was no damage to the aircraft.

Sunwing provided complimentary meals to passengers as they waited for the airline and Peel Police to search the plane. Nothing dangerous was found and the aircraft was deemed safe to return to service.

All but three of the customers boarded the flight again when it departed for Panama at about 3:15 p.m.

"Interestingly, two customers who missed the original flight this morning were able to board the delayed flight this afternoon," Ms. Chapman said.

The incident was the latest in a month of aviation trouble and deadly crashes around the world.

A similar event occurred in June when an Air Canada flight to Brazil was ordered back to Toronto several hours after departure when a man was able to pass through security unchecked, triggering an alarm that grounded flights at Pearson airport. Police interviewed the man and found no criminality in the incident.

More seriously, an Air Algérie plane carrying 116 people crashed in Mali Thursday, leaving no survivors, one day after 47 people died when a TransAsia Airways turboprop plane crash-landed on an island near Taiwan. A teenager died this week while attempting to fly around the world with his father, who is now missing after their plane crashed near American Samoa. And last week, a Malaysia Airlines plane carrying about 300 people was shot down over Eastern Ukraine.

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<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/man-threatened-to-kill-crew-blow-up-plane-on-london-to-los-angeles-flight/article19652706/#dashboard/alerts>

Man threatened to kill crew, blow up plane on London-to-Los Angeles flight

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A federal criminal complaint says a passenger on a flight this week from London to Los Angeles threatened to kill flight attendants and blow up the plane.

The FBI says 20-year-old Kevin Lee Mosele of Kihei, Hawaii, was charged Tuesday with interfering with a flight crew. He faces 20 years in federal prison if convicted.

The complaint says Mosele told investigator's he'd had several drinks in London before boarding the plane. It says he spit water on the crew and said he'd kill them before saying he was "going to set off a bomb."

The FBI says he had to be restrained and was arrested when the plane landed Monday for a layover in Los Angeles. It had been headed to Hawaii.

Mosele is free on a \$10,000 bond. It's unclear whether he's obtained a lawyer.