



GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT
AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION, INTERNATIONAL

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November 4, 2009

The Honorable James L. Oberstar, Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Oberstar:

As you move to mark up the Hazardous Materials Reauthorization bill, I wanted to express the views of the Air Line Pilots Association, International (ALPA) with respect to the provisions on the carriage by air of lithium batteries. ALPA has long advocated for improved transport requirements for lithium-ion and lithium-metal batteries and we are pleased your reauthorization bill mandates strict new requirements.

The current rules on lithium battery shipments are woefully inadequate to prevent onboard aircraft fires and safeguard passengers and crews. Since 2004, ALPA has urged the Department of Transportation to fully regulate lithium batteries as dangerous goods, including packaging, labeling, marking, testing and pilot notification requirements. This year alone, there have been at least five serious incidents involving lithium batteries in air transportation which posed potential danger to passengers, crew and individuals on the ground.

Lithium battery fires are unique in that these batteries can self-ignite and respond differently to typical fire suppression systems. Specifically, we are pleased your bill includes provisions to strengthen the ability to combat lithium battery fires by limiting the stowage of these cells and batteries to crew accessible positions when such devices cannot be transported in a fire-resistant container or when the aircraft does not contain a fire suppression system capable of extinguishing a lithium battery fire. ALPA pilots are trained to respond to smoke or fire incidents; however, we believe a much safer alternative is to prevent or suppress the opportunity for fire with proper packaging, fire resistant containers and aircraft fire suppression systems. We urge you to oppose any amendments which weaken this provision or any other proposed amendments to your bill that provide exemptions to proper packaging, stowage, notification, quantity limitations and shipment requirements.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has testified before your Committee that its pending draft rulemaking will improve lithium battery safety, including fully regulating lithium batteries as dangerous goods. We appreciate your strong guidance in ensuring that PHMSA will indeed promulgate regulations to mandate the safe shipment of lithium batteries.

Sincerely,

John H. Prater, President

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