

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Leads bill to ensure seat size, other real life conditions are considered in federal aircraft emergency evacuation standards

Posted on Friday, Dec 9, 2022

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) in announcing the *Emergency Vacating of Aircraft Cabin (EVAC) Act* to ensure the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does more to prioritize passenger safety by appropriately considering seat size, carry-on baggage, people with disabilities, seniors and children in its emergency evacuation standards.

The FAA's current standards require that passengers be able to evacuate aircraft within 90 seconds, but recent simulation tests failed to adequately consider whether a flight is full or mostly empty, has passengers with mobility issues or many other real-life conditions that Americans deal with every time they fly. An identical companion bill was introduced in the House today by Congressman Steve Cohen (D-TN-09), who authored the law that led the FAA to conduct these simulation tests.

“As we enter a busy holiday season, travelers should have the peace of mind that evacuation and safety protocols have taken all passengers into account,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “The FAA has a responsibility to ensure they meet their own safety requirements under realistic conditions, especially for children, senior citizens and passengers with disabilities.”

“Imagine being on a crowded flight when the worst-case scenario happens: the crew tells you that you have 90 seconds to evacuate—but how can more than 150

passengers sandwiched into crowded rows actually safely evacuate in less time than it takes to brush your teeth?” **said Senator Duckworth.** “The flying public deserves better. That’s why Senator Baldwin and I are introducing the *Emergency Vacating of Aircraft Cabins (EVAC) Act* to require the FAA to finally establish evacuation standards that consider not just seat size, pitch and configuration, but other real-life conditions like the presence of carry-on bags and passengers of different heights, weights, ages and abilities. We must act to make flying as safe as we know it can be—and as safe as Americans deserve.”

“I have long held doubts that the 90-second evacuation standard can be met in most instances, which is why I previously introduced and passed the *Seat Egress in Air Travel (SEAT) Act* to require the FAA to establish minimum standards for seat sizes and distances between rows of seats in order to ensure passengers can safely evacuate,” **said Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-09).** “The *EVAC Act* will ensure the FAA’s emergency evacuation standards address the needs of all members of the flying public, including those with disabilities.”

Recent FAA simulations to determine the impact of smaller seat size and smaller seat pitch on passengers’ ability to safely evacuate within 90 seconds were limited to test subjects who were all adults under age 60. Additionally, according to [CBS News](#), the tests did not include the presence of obstacles like carry-on baggage that could slow down an evacuation, and were conducted in groups of just 60, while Boeing 737 MAX 8 seating capacity, for instance, ranges from 162 to 178. Then-FAA Administrator Steve Dickson even conceded the tests “provide useful, but not necessarily definitive information...”

The *EVAC Act* would direct the FAA to issue a rule establishing evacuation standards that take into account certain real-life conditions including:

1. Passengers of different ages, including young children and senior citizens
2. Passengers of different heights and weights
3. Passengers with disabilities
4. Passengers who do not speak English
5. Passengers who cannot speak, are non-vocal or non-verbal
6. Presence of carry-on luggage and personal items like purses, backpacks and briefcases
7. Seat size and pitch
8. Seat configuration, location, and other obstacles in pathway to exit

“Cheers to Senator Duckworth, Senator Baldwin, and Rep. Cohen for introducing the *EVAC Act* to direct the FAA to establish evacuation standards that reflect the current realities of cabin environment including cabin density, carry-on bags, charging cords, and challenges for passengers with disabilities,” **said Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, representing 50,000 Flight Attendants at 19 airlines.** “In order to save lives, Flight Attendants are charged with evacuating passengers in 90 seconds during an emergency. We are concerned that current regulations for certification of the aircraft cabin don’t reflect our real world conditions. We don’t need the first test on this to be an active emergency. Let’s get real now! That’s what Senator Duckworth is making possible with this legislation.”

“As professional pilots, safety will always be our highest priority, and we strongly support the common-sense recommendation that the FAA reevaluate transport-category aircraft evacuation standards,” **said Allied Pilots Association President Capt. Ed Sicher.** “The realities of commercial air travel today — including widely differing passenger ages and physical abilities, language barriers, seat pods blocking access across aisles, and ever-shrinking seat size and pitch — all come into play when an evacuation becomes necessary. We applaud Senator Duckworth, Senator Baldwin, and Representative Cohen for taking the lead on this critical safety issue.”

This legislation is supported by a broad coalition: the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA), Transport Workers Union of America (TWU), Allied Pilots Association (APA), Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, FlyersRights.org, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), National League of Cities, Paralyzed Veterans of America, National Association of the Deaf, Judith Heumann, World Institute on Disability, Autism Society of America, Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), American Foundation for the Blind, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF), Muscular Dystrophy Association, All Wheels Up, Amputee Coalition, Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, United Spinal Association, ALS Association, Access Ready and American Council of the Blind.

A copy of the bill one-pager can be found [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).