European Union Aviation Safety Agency

FAQ n.111051

FAQs:

Passengers general, Passengers

Question:

Seats by exits (can I sit there?)

Answer:

Seats in rows leading to exits are often considered as offering more comfort because of the increased space provided at the exit area. The space requirements are set by aircraft certification rules. However, not all passengers are suitable to occupy these seats. A passenger seated by an exit agrees to assist the crew members in case of an evacuation and is willing and able to assist.

Air travel is a safe mode of transport and evacuations do not occur often. Cabin crew and pilots are trained for emergencies, however, some evacuations are events for which cabin crew (or pilots) did not have time to fully brief the passengers (this is so-called ‘unprepared evacuation’). The passenger seated by the exit where no cabin crew member is available, such as the exits over the wings, is expected to act. This includes assessing inside and outside conditions and making a decision if the exit can be opened for evacuation or not, and directing passengers to other exits if the conditions require so. Making a fast and correct judgment is a matter of survival. If the passenger allocated a seat by an exit is suitable to assist the crew, he/she will receive a pre-flight exit briefing on how and when to operate the exit.

Cabin crew may find the passenger unsuitable to assist the crew and will have to move the passenger to another seat row. A seat row leading to an exit is not to be left empty for taxiing, take-off and landing. The cabin crew will find another passenger to occupy the seat by the exit. When assessing the suitability of passengers to occupy seats by exits, cabin crew members consider many aspects, such as the aircraft type, number of exits, the level of difficulty to handle the exit and the assisting evacuation means, the number of passengers on the flight, etc. Passengers who are asked to move away from an ‘exit row/seat’ should not be offended by this action.

Human behaviour, although usually calm and collected under normal circumstances, can change under the pressure of an emergency situation. Passengers, who select, or are allocated seats by exits, should also make their own judgment whether they are suitable to help the crew members and willing to act in case of an unprepared evacuation.

EU rules do not permit some passengers to occupy seats which have a direct access to exits or seats where the passenger’s presence could impede crew members in their duties, obstruct access to equipment or impede evacuation: for example:

- passengers traveling with children,
- unaccompanied children,
- passengers with reduced mobility due to physical disability (sensory or locomotory, permanent or temporary),
- passengers with intellectual disability or impairment,
- any other cause of disability, or age,
- passengers travelling as deportees or inadmissible and prisoners in custody.

The airline may have further detailed policies related to passengers who cannot occupy seats by exits, e.g. passengers who are too young.

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Link:

https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/faq/111051