European Union Aviation Safety Agency

Passengers general

What is the difference between ‘rapid disembarkation’ and ‘evacuation’?

Answer

Passengers may encounter crew members’ sudden instruction to leave the aircraft as soon as possible. Not every such instruction means that ‘evacuation’ is taking place. In some situations, passengers are instructed to rapidly disembark, not to ‘evacuate’. So, what is the difference between a ‘rapid disembarkation’ and an ‘evacuation’? The below provides some explanation:

Rapid disembarkation

Rapid disembarkation (also referred to as ‘rapid deplaning’, ‘precautionary deplaning’, ‘precautionary disembarkation’) is a precautionary egress from the aircraft in situations assessed by the crew members as deviating from normal conditions but not being an immediate emergency, i.e. not posing an immediate threat to passengers and crew members on board, but which may escalate into an emergency. Rapid disembarkation usually happens at the airport.

Aircraft doors which were used for boarding are also used for a rapid disembarkation, i.e. with stairs or airbridge(s).

Emergency exits and slides are not used in a rapid disembarkation unless the crew members decide that this has become necessary and will give the relevant command to passengers.

Rapid disembarkation is a rapid egress from the aircraft, therefore passengers and crew members will leave all their belongings on board unless they are instructed otherwise.

Crew members’ instruction (i.e. words used) for a rapid disembarkation will be different from that to evacuate. It is essential that passengers listen to what the crew members are saying, remain calm and leave the aircraft as instructed and as soon as possible.

Evacuation

Evacuation is a fast egress from the aircraft in situations declared by the crew members as an emergency, i.e. posing an immediate threat to passengers and crew members on board. Evacuation happens on land terrain or in water.

All usable aircraft exits and slides/rafts are used in an evacuation. Passengers and crew members must leave all their belongings on board and immediately proceed to the nearest usable exit. It is vital that passengers listen to crew members' commands, remain calm (panicking will not help), ensure they have their life jacket if in water, and leave the aircraft as commanded by the crew members and as fast as possible.

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My luggage during evacuation

Answer

In the unlikely event the safety of the aircraft and its occupants is compromised, it may be necessary to evacuate the aircraft.
Evacuation is a fast egress from the aircraft in situations declared by cabin crew or pilots as an emergency, i.e. posing an immediate threat to passengers and crew members on board. Pilots and cabin crew are trained for such situations, however, it is essential that passengers cooperate with the crew and follow their instructions.

Evacuation slides are used when evacuating on land and rafts are used in case of a landing on water (Note: Some aircraft types are not required to be equipped with slides or rafts. Passengers step outside through the exits or, if possible, use the aircraft's integrated stairs). Evacuating as quickly as possible is a matter of survival.

Evacuation slide allows either one, or maximum two persons to slide down from the aircraft to the ground side-by-side. The speed at which the person reaches the ground is fast and it is essential to adopt a position to protect yourself from flailing or even falling off the evacuation slide. Evacuation raft allows a limited person/weight capacity.

Passengers and crew members **must leave** their luggage on board. Why is that?

Obstructions, injuries & delays during evacuation

Luggage in the overhead bins might have moved during the impact and luggage stowed under the seats may no longer be close to your seat. **Opening** the **overhead bins** may cause the **luggage** to **fall** onto you or onto other passengers causing **injuries**.

Searching and **retrieving** your **luggage** from the overhead bins or from under the seats creates an **obstruction** and **slows down** those trying **to reach the exit**. They may push you down, step on you and cause you injuries **preventing** you **from** moving and **leaving** the aircraft.

In addition, there may be low or no visibility at all inside the aircraft due to smoke or power failure of the lights and the aircraft may be damaged. You may trip over, fall down and injure yourself. Retrieving and taking your luggage reduces your chances and the chances of other passengers for a fast egress.

Blocked exits

Cabin crew must evacuate all passengers from the aircraft as quickly as possible. They have **no time to collect** and **no space to store luggage at exits**. Piles of luggage may **block** the **exit** and prevent you from leaving the aircraft quickly, or at all. You will have to look for another usable exit (if there is another usable exit available).

Your protection and damaged slides

Sliding down on the evacuation slide **with luggage prevents your own protection** (you will not be able to adopt a position to protect yourself) and can cause injuries to you or to others. It **slows** down the **evacuation** and **blocks** the **exit** preventing it from being used by those remaining on board. Your **luggage** can **damage** the evacuation **slide**.

Survival

Each crew member has specific duties during an evacuation to save lives. You will be ordered to leave the aircraft without luggage. Carrying luggage slows you down and can compromise your own survival.

LEAVE YOUR LUGGAGE ON BOARD.

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Wearing headphones and earplugs in the aircraft

Answer

Passengers often use headphones, connected to their laptops, mobile phones, tablets, etc., to watch movies or to listen to music, or they use headphones/earplugs to eliminate the surrounding noise. Whilst this may provide you – the passenger - with some comfort, it may affect your safety, especially when worn during taxiing, take-off and landing.

Wearing headphones or earplugs lowers your awareness of the surrounding conditions, resulting in more time needed to adapt to the ongoing situation. Your ability to hear announcements made by cabin crew or pilots is reduced. These announcements may contain safety instructions related to the flight, or commands in case of a sudden emergency.

Headphones used for an in-flight entertainment system (either provided by the airline or brought on board by you) may have cords, which are to be plugged-in on the seat or around the video screen on the seatback in front of you. Headphones with cords used during taxiing, take-off and landing create an obstruction for you and for passengers seated next to you and prevent you from moving quickly in case of an evacuation.

Pay attention to the safety demonstration and follow the instructions by your crew members.

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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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