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Not OK after all: IATA halts cabin bag size initiative

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Opposition from airlines in North America caused the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to pause the voluntary Cabin OK programme, just eight days after its launch.

Cabin OK is intended to assure passengers that their carry-on bags are allowed in the cabin, even when the flight is full.

IATA reported initial support from nine airlines for Cabin OK after launching the programme on 9 June, but amid some confusion the organisation had to clarify that it is not a binding mandate, and nor does it set a maximum size limit for carry-on bags.

Airlines for America (A4A), the industry trade organisation that represents major US carriers, said that none of its members support Cabin OK. The initiative "is unnecessary and flies in the face of the actions the US carriers are taking to invest in the customer experience, including larger overhead bins", argued A4A president and CEO Nicholas Calio. He added that A4A members "already have guidelines in place on what size bags they can accommodate".

IATA on 17 June insisted that many airlines support Cabin OK, but acknowledged that "significant concerns" were expressed by airlines in North America.

"We need to get it right," acknowledged Tom Windmuller, IATA senior vice-president for airport, passenger, cargo, and security services. "Today we are pausing the rollout and launching a comprehensive reassessment of the Cabin OK programme with plans to further engage programme participants, the rest of our members, and other key stakeholders."

COMMENT

IATA launched Cabin OK in recognition of the problem that passengers are boarding with larger carry-on bags, to avoid paying fees for checked baggage (this is particularly apparent with low-cost airlines and flights operated by US carriers). At the same time, load factors in most regions continue to increase, so flights are fuller. In the United States, for instance, load factors on commercial flights stood at 84% in 2014, compared with 73% in 2002.

The result is that overhead locker space has become increasingly scarce, and airlines often react



by transferring carry-on bags to the aircraft hold. This delays boarding and causes passenger dissatisfaction.

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