

Proposed Rule Change Addresses Lavatories On Airplanes | CPD Blog

JoLynne Lyon

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A [proposed rule change on accessible lavatories](#) on airplanes is up for comment through March 2. As it stands now, single-aisle aircraft are not required to have accessible lavatories—the rationale being that smaller plane flew shorter flights.

As aviation technology changes, smaller airplanes are flying for longer and longer periods.

It's an issue the CPD Project Coordinator Kelie Hess knows all too well. "With flying, if I really need to go to the restroom I have the ability to walk," she said. But it is difficult to get past other passengers; so much so that she limits what she drinks before she boards a plane if she knows it will be a long flight.

"I know a lot of people decide not to travel because of the risks and complications and implications of traveling," she said.

Mary Ellen Heiner, a CPD coordinator of programs, is one of them. "I have flown three times, and it was a nightmare," she said. The plane's lavatory didn't work for her, even when she used crutches, because her legs needed to be straight out, and the tiny room didn't allow for that.

Both women mentioned another problem not addressed by the proposed rule change: being separated from their own mobility equipment.

During those long-ago flights, Heiner's crutches were put in a closet far from her seat. "I was stuck in my seat unless I went to a lot of hassle," she said. And getting on the plane meant she had to use the airport's transport chair and depend on airline staff to get to her seat—where she was stuck for the duration of the flight. "It's embarrassing."

Hess has run up against real problems surrendering her own power chair on a flight. The last time she traveled by plane, her chair went to Dallas and she went to Phoenix. "I did everything in my power to talk with the airline about how to care for my chair," she said, but when she landed she was without the equipment she needed. "It was very frustrating."

The airline provided an oversize manual chair that she could not use. Thirty hours later they delivered her chair... sort of. They didn't have transportation that would allow them to unload the 250-pound equipment down a ramp, so they called on the hotel staff to help move it. "The solution that the airline provided was to not have a solution."

In spite of the hardships, Hess plans to keep flying. "I'm not going to say, 'Oh, I can't travel,' because if I don't, I feel I'm not doing the very best for my job." She works at the CPD's Salt Lake City location on the School to Work grant. She travels to make presentations, network with people from other states that are doing similar work, and learn what is working and what is not.

Heiner was invited to travel to Washington, D.C., for her job. "I hesitated over it for so long," she said. In the end she said no. She doesn't fly for business or pleasure after the experiences she has had, though she would love to visit family in Wisconsin. "I wish I could."

To read about the new proposed lavatories rule and find instructions on how to comment, visit the [Federal Register website](#).

Unfortunately the proposed change does not address the issue of separating people from their own equipment.