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CUPE's Safer Skies campaign convinced Transportation Committee to study aviation safety; Transport Canada must follow their lead and better protect passengers

Ottawa, Ontario – Last month, CUPE's Airline Division members met with MPs on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to carry a simple message: passenger safety and air quality on airlines must be improved. And CUPE's 10, 000 flight attendant call was heard. On December 1st, the committee agreed to "conduct a study on aviation safety in 2017".

Today in Ottawa, CUPE Airline Division President Michel Cournoyer will appear before the Canadian Aviation Regulation Advisory Council (CARAC) and tell Transport Canada officials that they too must fulfill their mandate to better protect the health and safety of passengers.

"On May 22nd 2014, during the last CARAC meeting, Transport officials admitted that the safety level provided by the ratio of one flight attendant to 50 passenger seats, now entrenched in regulation, will never be equivalent to that of the previous one flight attendant to 40 passengers ratio. Transport Canada also admitted that the change to the 1:50 ratio was not based on an up-to-date risk assessment. Eighteen months later, despite the change of government, Transport Canada continues to ignore the available evidence: the 1:50 ratio lowers passenger safety." said Cournoyer.

"CUPE's Airline Division calls on the government to restore the safety-proven 1:40 ratio, at least until Transport Canada conducts a new risk assessment of the 1:50 ratio in a fully transparent way. Key stakeholders must be involved in the process, and the risk assessment must be made available to the public. The Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities should oversee any review of the ratio, including a new risk assessment." added Cournoyer.

Toxic fumes

Another worrisome reality is that, on most aircraft, if there is an engine malfunction, passengers and crew can be exposed to toxic fumes in the cabin. This hazard can lead to the following symptoms while on board: irritation of eyes, nose and upper airways, cough, breathing difficulties, tightness in chest, blurred or tunnel vision, headache or light headedness, dizziness, difficulty concentrating, nausea, and vomiting. Longer term effects include damage to the respiratory and central nervous system, impaired memory and cognitive function, weakened immunity, cardiovascular disorders and possibly cancers.

"Transport Canada should immediately bring together representatives from the airline industry, the medical and scientific communities, and airline unions, to recommend all possible regulatory options to eliminate the harmful effects of toxic fumes." said Cournoyer.

“Transport Canada’s decision to allow Canadian airlines to fly with fewer flight attendants along with the risk of exposure to toxic fumes in the cabin represent very real threats to health and safety. Canadian passengers deserve more than the 55 minutes set aside in the CARAC agenda for stakeholders to express their concerns. They deserve real commitment from Transport Canada to find solutions and implement changes.” concluded Cournoyer.

CUPE’s Airline Division encourages Canadians to sign the Safer Skies petition calling for action on these important health and safety issues for both passengers and crew. The petition received more than 4,300 signatures so far. It is available on line at <http://cupe.ca/safer-skies>

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